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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

BATTERED WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF GROUP COUNSELLING: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

BY

© LYNDA KORDYBAN

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND
RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION IN COUNSELLING
PSYCHOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1987

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Battered Women's Experience of Group Counselling: A Phenomenological Study" submitted by Lynda June Kordyban in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Counselling Psychology.

John Osborne
Supervisor

Date: May 22, 1987

ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to explore how battered women experience group counselling based on a feminist perspective. Phenomenological methodology was utilized so as to arrive at a holistic understanding of their group experience as opposed to investigating one aspect of therapeutic change such as effect on self-esteem.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with four women who vary in age (i.e. 25 to 50) and educational level (i.e. Gr. 11 to university). They were self-selected from three different, but similarly conducted, group counselling programs in Edmonton: the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Edmonton Social Services agencies of Idylwylde and Jasper Place.

I first engaged in a process of self-reflection in order to be aware of my presuppositions of the group counselling experience so as to be cognizant of potential bias in data interpretation. The interview process involved three individual sessions with each participant: (1) the structuring interview, (2) the data gathering interview, and (3) the corroborative interview (Laferriere, cited by Becker, 1986). The second interview was taped and transcribed verbatim. A structural phenomenological analysis of each transcript was then conducted which followed the procedures as outlined by Colaizzi (1978) and Wertz (1984).

Twenty-one themes of experience were formulated from the extracted statements of the transcribed interviews. All but two were verified as common to all of the participants. The common themes were clustered into higher order themes which reflect a process of personal growth: greater awareness about self, others, relationships, and society; enhanced self-direction and; heightened appreciation of self and other women. The descriptive findings of this study speak to the effectiveness of the feminist group approach with physically and emotionally abused women.

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I wish to express my deepest appreciation to the many people who contributed to this thesis. My advisor, Dr. John Osborne, provided me with valuable guidance and new learning of phenomenological methodology. The members of my committee, Dr. Gerard Kysela and Professor Anne McLellan, gave me much needed encouragement. To the co-researchers who shared so much of themselves, a special thank you. To the group facilitators who introduced the co-researchers to me, my warm regards for doing invaluable counselling. To two wonderful friends and school mates, Cheryl Cucheran and Greg Pickering, for the many hours they devoted to reading the thesis and helping me with editing. And finally, to my special partner, Jim, for his loving support and much needed help with editing and typing.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is a phenomenological investigation of group counselling based on a feminist perspective with women who have been physically and emotionally abused by their husbands. In beginning a phenomenological study, Colaizzi (1978) suggests that the researcher engage in self-reflection by asking: how do I come to be involved with this particular phenomenon; and why do I choose this particular phenomenon? These questions are asked to assist the researcher in gaining a greater understanding of her values and assumptions which will influence her interpretation of the data. I answer these questions through the following narrative.

Personal Narrative

One summer day in 1980 when I was 24, a friend asked me: "what happened to your happy-go-lucky self?" "You seem depressed", she said. The tears started to flow as I began to tell her of my husband's anger and the things he was saying to me: "get off your high horse"; "you don't know what you're talking about"; "you are nothing but a wimp." Until that day I found myself unable to tell anyone what I was experiencing in my marriage. I hid it for over a year but could not hold it inside any longer. I knew I had to talk about it because I was becoming more and more depressed. I was working as a social worker at the time.

There were days that I sat at my desk, too numb to be able to concentrate. I thought if my co-workers knew they would see me as incompetent. I did not want to tell my family or friends because I thought they would see me as a failure which was how I felt.

My friend was very supportive and after consoling me for a time she told me things she had not told me before even though we had been friends for three years. She told me of the times that her husband had mistreated her. Through her sharing I began to feel less ashamed. I felt accepted and understood by her. She did not see me as incompetent; rather, she knew what I was experiencing. Our sharing helped me to begin sharing with others, although I was very selective in who I chose to tell. The next day I told my mother and a female co-worker. With the support of these women I began to feel more self-confident. I left my marriage the following spring although I had been thinking about leaving for some time. I had been married for six years.

It was not until two years later that I came to name my experience as being one of emotional abuse. I came to this awareness through reading Ginny Nicarthy's book (1982) in which she gives a checklist of emotionally abusive behaviors. Many of these were reminiscent of my husband's behavior. I was reading her book in preparation to co-

counsel a group for women who were being physically abused by their husbands.

I was excited about facilitating this group because I felt it would be a positive experience for these women, as well as for me. Through our sharing I saw these women grow in self-confidence and form much needed relationships with other women. This group experience was particularly insightful for me. Initially I saw myself as different from these women because I had not been physically abused and because I was "the counsellor". However, as these women shared their experiences I came to see our similarities. They were emotionally abused in much the same way that I was and I found myself identifying with their feelings. Through their sharing I was able to more fully experience my feelings of shame and anger. I feel very appreciative of their sharing.

Now, three years later, I think about these women and realize that I want to know more about the experience of being with other physically and emotionally abused women. I wonder how it is that being with other women affects a woman's thoughts and feelings about herself. My own experience makes me postulate that there is something very special when a group of women come together to support one another. There seems to be more "energy" than there is in a one-to-one relationship.

Being with others is one dimension of human existence. Keen (1978) writes that "everyone who is is in three ways: being a body in space, being with others, and being a self in time" (p. 241). In order to understand the "whole" of experience we need to understand the relationship amongst these three dimensions. We cannot fully understand them in isolation of each other because they affect each other. Mander (1974) writes that: "to the degree that we as women have been able to remain in touch with our bodies we have also remained aware of the way in which our bodies and our mind-feelings are coordinated and truly inseparable from one another" (p. 14). To add to this, our body-mind-feeling experiences are affected through our relationships with others and by language and culture (Keen, 1978). For example, my view of 'self' is affected by the views others hold of me as well as by the societal views of women. It is through becoming conscious of these aspects that I can choose what is healthy and reject what is not.

An investigation of the many dimensions of experience is best done through a phenomenological approach which studies a lived-experience in a holistic way. By keeping in mind the relationship between the different aspects of experience, I begin my investigation into women's experience of being with other abused women in group counselling. I will use the term "battered women" in my thesis because this is the commonly used term in the literature. However, I prefer not to refer to physically abused women as "battered women" because this term implies a label.

Overview of Thesis

As well as outlining the emerging question of this study, Chapter One includes a review of the literature pertaining to the psychological effects of being battered, reasons for staying in the marriage, counselling issues with battered women, feminist counselling, and the group approach. Although it is not within the scope of this literature review to discuss the various explanations or theories of causation, factors associated with wife battering are included.

Chapter Two describes and contrasts phenomenological methodology with the natural scientific approach focusing on the issue of research validity. A presentation of my beliefs and presuppositions in beginning this study is also included.

Chapter Three describes the phenomenological method used in this study. Chapter Four presents the results of the phenomenological analysis of the data. Individual and shared experiences are described. Chapter Five includes further discussion of the co-researchers' experiences followed by implications for therapy with physically and emotionally abused women.

Preface to Literature Review

Wife battering has been recognized within the last ten years or so as a frequently occurring phenomenon. Data from a nationally representative sample in the United States suggest that 1.8 million wives are battered by their husbands in any one year (Straus, 1978). A Canadian survey (MacLeod, 1980) estimates that one in ten women are battered by their husbands or live-in lovers. In 1984, 3,235 battered women and 4,415 children were housed in Alberta's thirteen women's emergency shelters (Alberta Social Services and Community Health [ASSCH], 1985).

There is general agreement amongst researchers that battered women come from all ages, ethnic and social groups, and educational levels (Gayford, 1977; Pagelow, 1981; Rounsaville & Weissman, 1978; Walker, 1984). A battered woman is commonly defined in the research literature as a woman who is subjected to "serious and/or repeated physical injury as a result of deliberate assaults by her spouse" (Hilberman, 1980, p. 1338). This definition incudes both legal and common law marriages.

The usual forms of physical attack include pushing, slapping, punching, and kicking; and the resultant injuries include bruises, black eyes, miscarriages, lacerations, fractures, and death (Star, 1978b). The physical assaults are rarely isolated events and tend to escalate in frequency and severity over time (Barnes, 1985).

Most studies tend to focus on physical abuse which is amenable to quantitative measurement. However, battered wives also report experiences of emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse from their husbands. Walker (1979, 1984) has conducted the most extensive research with battered women. She describes psychological and emotional battering which includes the following behavior of the batterer: (1) threats of homicide or suicide; (2) verbal name calling and constant criticism of the victim; (3) isolating the victim from social support; (4) destruction of the victim's material possessions and; (5) abuse of family pet(s). She also describes the sexual abuse of physically battered women which includes excessive jealousy, forced sexual activity, rape, and mutilation of genitals and breasts.

Ferraro (1979) believes that a sharp distinction is made between emotional and physical battering because of the tendency of researchers to separate mind and body experiences. This predisposition is based on the notion of mind/body duality which characterizes Western thought. Ferraro (1979) views emotional and physical abuse as inseparable. She suggests that separating them results in "irrelevant data and misinformed attitues" (p. 147).

Helping Battered Women

The awareness that many women were being physically beaten by their husbands developed with the re-emergence of the women's movement in the 1960's (Ridington, 1978). Women involved in "women's rights" groups began to hear about other women who were being victimized by their husbands. This awareness spawned a demand for protection and refuge for battered women and their children. Consequently, transition houses and shelters were set up in the early 1970's.

The experience garnered from providing protection and shelter for battered women demonstrated to helpers that these women were psychologically traumatized as a result of the battering. It was soon recognized that emotional support and counselling would be important to the battered woman's healing process. Ferraro (1981) asserts that it is not sufficient to focus on practical needs such as housing, employment, and legal assistance. She believes that some financially independent women returned to their husbands after leaving the shelter because of the lack of emotional support.

The question of how best to counsel battered women is foremost at the present time. Some clinical researchers (Geller & Walsh, 1978) recommend marital counselling whereas others (Fleming, 1979; Pressman, 1984; Walker, 1978b) suggest that individual or group counselling for both partners should precede couple therapy regardless of whether the wife wishes to remain in or leave the marriage. The latter group of writers suggest this because they assert that battered women need the opportunity to release their pain and anger and to heal before relationship issues can be adequately addressed. Bograd (1984) suggests that therapists who begin with couple counselling are biased in terms of wanting to save the marriage in spite of the violence and could tend to implicate the wife as responsible in some way for her husband's violent behavior.

The majority of clinicians advocate that a feminist approach is necessary in counselling battered women and abusive men (Walker, 1979). Feminist value orientation and feminist counselling are elaborated upon later in this chapter. Government and public agencies are currently publishing educational manuals for helpers which advocate a feminist approach (ASSCH, 1885; Lichtenstein, Waisberg & Small, 1984; Liutkus, J. & Davidovich, G., 1984; Massachussetts Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups, 1981; McGee, 1982; Sinclair, 1985).

However, because counselling programs for battered wives and abusive husbands are still in their infancy, little evaluative research has been done. Formative evaluation which is concerned with whether programs work as intended is often used in the beginning stages of program development to demonstrate a program's strengths and its weaknesses so that improvements can be made (Gage & Berliner, 1984). This type of evaluation is very important in a new program area such as marital violence because myths are being challenged and new intervention strategies are being developed (Willingham, 1982). The present study will contribute to understanding how battered women experience group counselling based on a feminist perspective. The group approach is the preferred modality for battered women given their social isolation and feelings of stigmatization (Lewis, 1983; Rounsaville, Lifton & Bieber, 1979).

In her exploratory study on the effectiveness of formal help-sources, Bowker (1983) reports that battered women describe the group experience as being very positive because of improvement in self-esteem. She has also done a study with Donato (1984) on the helpseeking patterns of 146 battered women. They indicate that women's groups are more helpful than traditional social service agencies. Based on her interviews with battered women, Kremen (1984) suggests that groups should be a primary counselling approach because the women valued the contact with other battered women, especially the mutual support.

For this study, "group therapy" or "group counselling" will refer to a process which involves meetings of physically and emotionally abused women with professional female counsellors who act as facilitators and who have a feminist value orientation. There is some debate amongst professional helpers whether the terms "counselling" and "therapy" are interchangeable. I have choosen to use these terms interchangeably based on the understanding that the meaning of both terms signifies the act of helping to facilitate self-understanding and to enhance self-growth.

Research with Battered Women

The recognition of the prevalence of wife battering and the awareness of battered women's psychological trauma has led to a great deal of research and writing. In a bibliography on spouse abuse, Engeldinger (1986) cites over 1700 references. In his review of the literature, Gelles (1980) notes that literature on wife battering was almost non-existent in the sixties.

Research with battered women has focused on determining: (1) the causes of battering; (2) the psychological effects of being battered and; (3) why these women stay in the marriage for extended periods of time. Studies have employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative studies have focused on measuring personality variables through the use of personality tests. These studies are mentioned later in this chapter. Qualitative studies such as the ones by Ferraro and Johnson (1983) and Walker (1979, 1984) have used interviews with battered women to learn how and why they are victimized. However, no known qualitative studies use a phenomenological approach which requires: (1) outlining the researcher's presuppositions and biases; (2) validating interpretations of the data with participants and; (3) producing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon of interest (Colaizzi, 1978; Polkinghorne, 1981). I am aware of only one phenomenological study on the experience of being battered presently being conducted by a student at the University of Victoria.

The phenomenological approach is one method of qualitative research. All methods of qualitative research have a common goal of understanding the "point of view" or the experience of the participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). However, phenomenological methodology goes one step further by providing a general description of the essential structures of an experience (Jennings, 1986).

Methodology which requires researchers to examine and state their biases and prejudgements would be particularly valuable in marital violence research which is fraught with implicit values and assumptions. In addition, past researchers begin with specific questions for which they want answers. Phenomenological research does not attempt to answer _a priori_ questions or hypotheses. Rather, it strives to obtain a description of the lived-experience. In this way the data is allowed to speak for itself (Colaizzi, 1978). The aim is _a posteriori_ understanding.

Although a vast amount of research has already been done, the results are not conclusive. Research methodologies such as phenomenology may add to our understanding of wife battering and of how battered women experience different therapeutic interventions.

Why Women Are Battered

Although a variety of internal, external, and relational factors have been examined in order to determine why women are battered, "there is no definitive research on the causes of marital violence" (Roberts, 1984, p. 1). Some factors implicated in wife battering include: (1) individual psychopathology; (2) childhood exposure to violence; (3) traditional sex-role socialization; (4) status differences (i.e. education, occupation) within the couple; (5) economic and other stresses and; (6) the abuse of alcohol and drugs (Gelles & Cornell, 1985; Roberts, 1984; Rounsaville, 1978). However, these factors, in isolation, do not account for the occurrence of wife battering.

Sociologists such as Steinmetz and Straus (1974) view marital violence as multiply determined. They emphasize cultural factors stating that a marriage license is a "hitting license". This view is shared by feminist researchers (Dobash & Dobash, 1978; Martin, 1976; Walker, 1981b) who have looked to the history of women as wives to explain the high occurence of wife battering. They see wife battering as a reflection of the unequal power relationships between men and women. Historically, women were considered to be the chattels or possessions of their husbands. Through marriage women lost legal rights as their identity was subsumed under their husband's identity. These laws also gave husbands the legal right to chastise their wives

(Martin, 1976). Until 1874 husbands had the right to beat their wives as long as they used a whip or stick that was no thicker than their thumbs (Calvert, 1974). Currently, the feminist perspective is pre-eminent because it accounts for the prevalence of wife battering as being a result of the devaluation of women within a patriarchal society.

Psychological Effects of Being Battered

Qualitative studies often describe battered women as low in self-esteem, lacking self-confidence, anxious, mistrustful, depressed, self-blaming, emotionally withdrawn, and socially isolated (Hilberman & Munson, 1978; Rounsaville, Lifton & Bieber, 1979; Walker, 1979; Wetzel & Ross, 1983). Quantitative studies which have used comparison groups of nonbattered women reveal that battered women have lower self-esteem, experience more self-conflict, and are more withdrawn and passive than are non-battered women (Gellen, Hoffman, Jones & Stone, 1984; Hartik, 1982; Star, 1978a). However, the results of quantitative studies have limited generalizability because of small sample sizes. Researchers such as Nichols (1981) suggest that we too quickly assume that battered women display greater passivity and dependency as compared to other women who experience emotional distress.

In addition to examining personality characteristics, research also reveals that battered women, as compared to non-battered women, have twice the number of miscarriages, are more likely to be given prescriptive drugs such as mild tranquilizers, use psychiatric facilities five times more often, and are more likely to attempt suicide (Stark, 1981). These findings suggest that battered women are not receiving adequate and appropriate help. Rather, they are being misdiagnosed by medical and psychiatric personnel (Stark, 1981).

Klingbeil & Boyd (1984) and Walker (1984) view the negative effects of battering as constituting the "battered woman syndrome". Walker (1984) explains that the "battered woman syndrome" can be subsumed under the diagnostic category of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III). The psychological reactions of battered women are seen to be similar to the reactions of victims of various traumas (Browne, 1980).

The literature cited in this section suggests that women's psychological wellness is harmed as a result of being battered. The findings speak to the importance of appropriate therapeutic intervention in helping to restore the well-being of battered women.

Why Women Stay

Masochism has been used to explain why women stay in abusive marriages for extended periods of time (Rounsaville, 1978). However, this explanation is rejected by the majority of researchers (Carlson, 1977; Egger & Crancher, 1982; Ferraro & Johnson, 1983; Gelles, 1976; Martin, 1976;

Ridington, 1978; Roy, 1977; Strube & Barbour, 1983; Walker, 1978a). Through their use of interviews with battered women, the above cited researchers have learned that battered women do not like being beaten but rather remain in abusive marriages because of complex psycho-social reasons. These reasons include: (1) economic dependency; (2) social pressure to keep the family together; (3) self-blame; (4) shame; (5) poor self-concept; (6) fear of being alone; (7) hope that her husband will change; (8) denial or minimization of victimization and; (9) fear of husband retaliation.

Walker (1978a, 1979, 1984) hypothesizes that battered women remain in abusive marriages because they feel powerless to change their situation. Her hypothesis is based on the concept of "learned helplessness". She cites the research of Seligman (1975) who found that dogs stopped all activity and became passive when nothing they did eliminated electrical shocks. Walker contends that battered women learn to feel helpless because their attempts to stop the abuse often prove to be unsuccessful. Battered women who have reached out for help often receive inadequate help from community services (i.e. legal, medical, social service agencies) and even when they do leave they are often subjected to continued abuse by their husbands.

Walker (1978a) expands upon her hypothesis to explain why women stay or return to abusive relationships by describing what she calls the "cycle of violence." This cycle has three phases: "the tension building phase; the explosion of acute battering incidents; and the calm, loving respite" (p. 532). The third phase keeps a woman entrapped in the relationship because her husband's kind behavior is her reinforcement for staying. Dutton and Painter (1982) refer to this process of entrapment as "traumatic bonding".

The literature presented in this section explains that battered women stay in abusive relationships because of social, financial, and psychological reasons. Counsellors need to explore all of these reasons with battered women to help end their victimization.

Counselling Battered Women

To help battered women, counsellors must first examine their own beliefs and values (Sinclair, 1985). The majority of research clinicians (Ball & Wyman, 1978; Bograd, 1982, 1984; Fleming, 1981; Walker, 1985) assert that counsellors working with battered women need to have a feminist orientation. Walker (1985) states that unless a feminist analysis is included when developing therapy programs for both victims and offenders, counsellers will continue to perpetuate family violence and re-traumatize the victims.

Feminist Value Orientation

As noted earlier, the feminist perspective views wife battering as a result of the subordination and devaluation of women. Pressman (1984) provides several feminist values which she believes counsellors must have in order to work effectively with battered women. They include:

> 1) No woman ever deserves to be hit, pushed, shoved, kicked or physically hurt in any way.
>
> 2) Women are not masochistic and in no way do they derive any pleasure from being physically hurt or threatened.
>
> 3) A major contributing factor to women remaining in battering relationships is the endorsement and teaching by our social insitutions that women belong in the home, are less competent than men to succeed in the work force, should defer to the dominance of their husbands and should be the primary emotional support of the family.
>
> 4) In counselling, the problems of the marital relationship cannot be the initial focus. Until all family members are safe, it it too dangerous to discuss problems of the family or the relationship other than the violence.
>
> 5) Anyone working with battered women must provide role models of competent, successful, assertive women. They must confront and challenge the belief of many battered women that they are responsible for the battering and help battered women develop a sense of themselves as competent and able to make decisions and choices. By allowing each battered woman to make decisions and respecting those decisions even when those decisions are not the ones counsellors would make for themselves, counsellors can powerfully indicate their belief in the woman's strength. (pp. 44-45)

Counselling Issues With Battered Women

A variety of practical and therapeutic issues need to be addressed with battered women (Conroy, 1982; Pressman, 1984; Silverman, 1981; Sinclair, 1985; Star, 1978b; Walker, 1981a; Weingourt, 1979). These include: (1) physical safety; (2) minimization of their victimization; (3) referrals to needed resources; (4) why battering occurs; (5) reasons for staying/ambivalence; (6) low self-esteem; (7)

mourning and loss; (8) feelings of shame and failure; (9) body integration and sexuality; (10) isolation and loneliness; (11) internalized anger/depression and; (12) their children's physical and psychological health. These issues are best addressed through feminist counselling (Walker, 1985).

The findings of this study will contribute to understanding the issues which need to be explored with battered women.

Feminist Counselling

Feminist counselling, an approach which has arisen out of the women's movement, has become increasingly popular for female clients (Collier, 1982; Greenspan, 1983; Russell, 1984; Sturdivant, 1980). It aims to increase women's self-esteem and independence through expanded awareness of the negative aspects of traditional female socialization. It developed out of the awareness that traditional counselling approaches do not adequately meet the needs of women because they do not address the negative aspects of traditional female socialization and the devaluation of women in our society.

According to Lerman (1976), one of the major philosophical differences between the traditional and the feminist approach is how the client is viewed by the therapist. She explains that the feminist therapist does not assume the stance of an expert but rather sees the client as being the most knowledgeable about her own thoughts and feelings. Lerman (1976) describes feminist counselling as "a logical extension of humanistic thinking into the awareness of sex-role issues" (p.378).

Feminist counselling which addresses women's problems within the context of the broader social, economic, and political environment focuses on the issues of powerlessness; limited behavioral and emotional options; inadequate communication skills; lack of trust in self-direction; old rules and expectations; failure to nurture self; diffused sense of self; anger; balancing independence with interdependence and; confusion between internal and external causes (Collier, 1982). The latter issue is seen by Collier (1982) to be particularly relevant to battered women who tend to internalize society's "blame the victim" attitude.

Although feminist therapy may employ techniques, for example, from gestalt therapy (i.e. "I" language), rational-emotive therapy (i.e. awareness of irrational beliefs), and behavioral therapy (i.e. assertiveness training); Russell (1984) proposes a core of five skills which distinguish feminist counselling from other counselling methods. She explains that these skills are higher order skills as compared to the necessary and basic skills of attending (i.e. reflection of feeling, paraphrasing) and facilitation (i.e. empathy, positive regard). These core skills consist of: (1) positive evaluation of women (conveying positive valuation of female attributes which have been devalued); (2) social analysis (assessment of social and cultural restraints on women's behavior); (3) encouragement of total development (focus on self-responsibility and choice; balanced integration of both male and female traits); (4) behavior feedback (providing concise feedback on behavior based on observation rather than interpretation) and; (5) self-disclosure (counselor's disclosure of her philosophy, values, and relevant personal information).

The preceeding section presents an understanding of what constitutes the feminist counselling approach. The findings of this study will contribute to understanding the important aspects of this approach in counselling battered women.

The Group Approach

Feminist counselling is often done within the context of a group. A wide variety of women's groups are currently run, usually co-facilitated by professional and/or lay female counsellors; each with a particular focus (i.e. self-esteem enhancement, menopause, self-healing, mother-daughter relationships, feminine spirituality). Groups are now being conducted specifically for battered women. Sinclair (1985) explains that even though male counsellors may show great sensitivity to victims of violence, only women can lead these groups for two main reasons:

> 1. An assaulted wife goes through a process of being fearful and then angry at men. The closest man in her life has victimized her. She needs to be able to get angry about it. A male group leader inhibits this process.
>
> 2. An assaulted wife needs to learn to trust that she can protect herself. This best happens through the modelling of a female leader, who with confidence and assertiveness shows that women can act to take care of themselves. (p. 103)

The purpose of the group is to facilitate sharing and emotional support between the women (Gottlieb, Burden, McCormick & Nicarthy, 1983; Heppner, 1978; Pressman, 1984). Sinclair (1985) writes that "leaving or not leaving the violent relationship is not the issue"; rather "the primary purpose of the group is to support the women in taking the necessary steps to ensure they will no longer be victims of abuse" (p. 104). She believes the group approach is important for six reasons:

> 1. Becoming a member of a group for assaulted women enables a woman to name her abusive experience.
>
> 2. The group is a safe place where members are encouraged to tell their stories of assault and oppression.
>
> 3. Isolation is broken down as individual women realize that others have had similar experiences.
>
> 4. The group provides positive support.
>
> 5. The group is energizing. As women begin to work together to change their lives, their collective efforts produce an energizing force that surpasses what can happen in individual sessions.
>
> 6. The group becomes a viable source of protection for its members, by providing realistic feedback, sharing resources and broadening personal support networks. (p. 100)

The group format may be time-limited (i.e. ten weekly sessions) and closed to new members after the second or third session or it may be ongoing and open to new members at any time until there is an appropriate group size. To my knowledge, most group counsellors prefer to work with 6-12 individuals. Sinclair does not discuss group size, however, she states that open groups have difficulty moving beyond the identification stage because of the continual intake of new members. Based on my group counselling experience, I found that the ongoing and open group to be advantageous because women need the support over several months; and it is encouraging for new members to see the progress of experienced group members.

Group Process

Walker (1979) writes that two-stage groups are needed. The first stage focuses on emotional support, information on resources, and the many myths surrounding wife battering. Two such myths, as stated by Hilberman (1980) are:

> The husband is not responsible because he is sick, mentally ill, alcoholic, unemployed, or under stress.
>
> If the woman is good, quiet, and compliant, her husband will not abuse her. (p. 1345)

The second stage is more insight oriented and focuses on rebuilding lives through the exploration of psychological and relationship issues. Weingourt (1985) proposes an existential model for the second stage of the therapy process. She believes that in rebuilding their lives battered women are confronted with the givens of existence as seen by Yalom (1980) to be death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness.

According to Yalom (1985) these existential factors are one of eleven primary factors of the therapeutic group experience. The other ten factors include:

1. Instillation of hope.
2. Universality.
3. Imparting of information.
4. Altruism
5. The corrective recapitulation of the primary family group.
6. Development of socializing techniques.
7. Imitative behavior.
8. Interpersonal learning.
9. Group cohesiveness.
10. Catharsis. (p. 1)

Although Yalom (1985) does not specifically discuss the group experience of battered women, I expect many of the themes that he formulates would also be applicable to their experience. He discusses an unpublished study he conducted with Tinklenberg and Gilula (1968) which explored the patients' appraisal of the therapeutic factors. The participants, outpatients with neurotic or characterologic problems (sex of participants not given), rated the following two items as being the most important in their experience: "discovering and accepting previously unknown or unacceptable parts of myself" (theme of self-understanding) and "being able to say what was bothering me instead of holding it in" (theme of catharsis) (p. 75). I surmise that these two experiences are also important to battered women. In this study, I have not asked participants to rank in order the importance of their experiences but have paid attention to what is repeated and emphasized by the women.

In her study of an ongoing group for women in abusive relationships, in which she was both a co-facilitator and observer, Hartman (1983) identifies six phases the women move through as they participate in the group. In phase one, the women are encouraged to focus on their own feelings and behavior which begins the change from other-directedness to self-direction. Phase two involves a heightening of self-esteem through interacting with other women who are supportive. Their increased self-esteem enables them to develop a protection plan (phase three). After a protection plan is completed, and the physical assaults cease, the women move into a more intense phase of catharis (phase four). The fifth phase reveals the development of autonomous and assertive behavior which is transferred to relationships outside of the group. The last phase involves discussion of related issues such as "sexuality, communication styles, work-related issues, friendships, family of origin patterns, shame, incest, and child rearing" (p. 144). Hartman states that the movement through these phases involved many months for the first members of the group. Her study can be described as a phenomenological evaluation which involves a report on the process of therapeutic change by a participant-observer (Willingham, 1982).

Sinclair (1985), in describing the growth process of assaulted women, uses the "dependency cycle" theory as defined by Nola Symor (1977). Sinclair explains that assaulted women move from dependence (minimization of abuse and self-blame), to counter-dependence (anger at husband and at society), to independence (primary focus on her needs and goals), and finally to interdependence (ability to care for herself; confidence in her ability to act if abused again).

The literature on group therapy based on a feminist perspective with battered women suggests that this intervention helps to facilitate physical and emotional well-being. This study will aid in understanding the therapeutic aspects of this counselling approach with battered women.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the research concerning battered women. Qualitative researchers (Hilberman & Munson, 1978; Walker, 1979) suggest that battered women are also psychologically harmed as a result of being battered. Quantitative studies (Hartik, 1982; Star, 1978a), which utilized personality tests, indicate that battered women (as compared to non-battered women) experience more self-conflict and passivity. However, the quantitative studies are of limited usefulness because of small sample sizes.

Awareness of the harmful psychological effects of being battered (i.e. low self-esteem, self-blame, depression, psychological entrapment in the relationship) has led to the recent development of counselling programs for battered women and abusive partners. Although some clinical researchers recommend couple counselling, the majority of researchers advocate group counselling based on a feminist perspective for battered women (Walker, 1979). Advocates of feminist group counselling assert that battered women need to release their pain and to heal before couple issues can be adequately addressed. Because feminist group counselling for battered women is a recent phenomenon, there is little research focusing on battered women's experience ~~with this~~ type of therapeutic intervention (Donato & Bowker, 1984).

The purpose of this study is to explore how battered women experience group counselling which is based on a feminist perspective. Phenomenological methodology is utilized so as to arrive at a holistic understanding of the group experience as opposed to investigating one aspect of therapeutic change such as effect on self-esteem. The phenomenological approach looks at many aspects of the experience; facilitating discovery of the therapeutic aspects of feminist group counselling. The findings of this study may aid future researchers wishing to evaluate different counselling approaches by providing them with the general basis for the formulation of specific questions. In addition, it is very important to go to the actual lived-experience of a client to determine if a counselling approach is helpful rather than only obtaining the therapist's perception of whether it is helpful.

The next chapter will discuss the literature as it pertains to the methodology of this study, with particular focus on the question of validity.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Two Approaches of Research

Research in psychology has largely focused on phenomena which are observable, measurable, and duplicable (Colaizzi, 1978). This method of research, referred to as the natural scientific approach, is concerned with the formulation of hypotheses in order to predict cause-effect relationships (Valle & King, 1978). It attempts to formulate and test theories of human behavior. However, despite the strenuous attempt to obtain valid results, there are often extraneous variables unaccounted for in the cause-effect relationship.

Phenomenology is a relatively new research approach in psychology (Colaizzi, 1978). It does not attempt to explain the occurrence of a phenomenon but rather seeks to understand its very nature. The intention is to gain insightful descriptions of our experience (Van Manen, 1984). By focusing on a phenomenon of human experience, phenomenology strives to explicate the meaning or the essential elements of that experience (Valle & King, 1978). It focuses therefore, not only on observable behavior, but also on the inner experience of thoughts, emotions, and sensations. Valle & King (1978) state that we need to turn to the phenomenological approach to complement the natural scientific approach. In this way, by investigating the entirety of human experience, we will gain greater knowledge about human science.

Philosophical Differences

The natural scientific and the human science approaches to research are based on different philosophies. The major distinction rests on the question of whether human existence can be divided into separate parts. The natural scientific approach is based on the philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650) who posited that the methods used in natural science could be adapted to the study of human behavior. His view was that the mind and body are "two distinct and independently separate entities" (Sahakian, 1968, p. 137-138). He believed that only that which is directly observable is worthy of being the basis of an exact science. All human experience "not graspable by sensory perception" was not investigated because of its "subjective" nature (de Mare, 1972, p. 79). Descartes's formulation began the first scientific revolution; the hallmarks of which were measurement, quantification, and experimentation. This experimental approach was applied to scientific psychology in 1879 by Wilhelm Wundt necessarily at the expense of understanding inner experience (Colaizzi, 1978).

The phenomenological approach to research is based on existential-phenomenological thought which views human experience in a holistic way (Colaizzi, 1978). It opposes the notion of dualism commonly referred to today as the

"Cartesian split". Just as mind and body were separated, all aspects of being human were and continue to be analyzed from the perspective of dualism: 'inner'/'outer' worlds, thought/action, unconscious/conscious, fantasy/fact, individual/group (de Mare, 1972).

Existential-phenomenological thought implies that existence is actually "being-in-the-world." (Valle & King, 1978). That is, we have no existence apart from the world and the world has no existence apart from us. "Each individual and his or her world are said to co-constitute one another" (Valle and King, 1978, p. 7). Therefore, we cannot be understood in isolation from our environment.

Phenomenological Methodology

Husserl (1859-1938), the founder of phenomenology, first propounded the concept of Lebenswelt which is synonymous with the notion of co-constitutionality. Lebenswelt encompasses the total interrelatedness of human experience within the socio-cultural-historical context (Sahakian, 1968). The Lebenswelt, referred to by phenomenologists as the life-world, is "the everyday world as it is lived by all of us prior to explanations and theoretical interpretations of any kind" (Giorgi, 1975, p. 99). It is this world that we must enter to contact the immediate lived-experience of a phenomenon. The method of contacting this experience or this consciousness is Husserl's conception of phenomenology. It begins by employing "phenomenological reduction" which "allows us to view directly the Lebenswelt and see its structural reality" (Sahakian, 1968, p. 334).

Phenomenological reduction is a personal process of becoming aware of one's values and biases so that one may be more open to seeing the phenomenon as it is actually lived. Although this process of self-reflection continues throughout a research study, the researcher must come to some understanding of her beliefs and presuppositions before contacting the subjects. This is done so as to avoid seeing only that which fits with the researcher's understanding of the particular experience being investigated. The procedure of contacting the participants' lived-experience is commonly done by asking them to communicate their experience verbally and/or in writing (Colaizzi, 1978).

The process of becoming aware of one's presuppositions is also referred to by Colaizzi (1978) as bracketing. My beliefs and presuppositions in beginning this study are described later in this chapter. Bracketing also serves to enhance 'control' in a study. That is, would another researcher or a reader see what the researcher saw in light of the researcher's perspectives (Giorgi, 1975)? If so, then the researher's results can be viewed as being valid.

Question of Validity

The question of validity is an important consideration in scientific study. Researchers are particularly concerned with obtaining "valid" results. Wertz (1984) explains that for qualitative researchers, the question centers on whether the description of the experience expresses the truth of the situation as it is lived by the subjects. These descriptions are often dismissed by quantitative researchers because they allege that the results are not objective but are the subjective interpretations of the researcher (Kvale, 1986). However, Colaizzi (1978) contends that the issue revolves around one's conception of objectivity. He views objectivity as "fidelity to phenomena". That is, "a refusal to tell the phenomenon what it is, but a respectful listening to what the phenomenon speaks of itself" (p. 52). This "respectful listening" is done through the process of bracketing, although recognizing the unlikelihood that one can be aware of and put aside all of one's prejudgments.

All ~~of~~ scientific knowledge is based to some degree on the values and biases of the individuals doing the research. Rollo May (quoted in de Mare, 1972) states that:

> every form of psychology or psychiatry rests upon some kind of philosophic presupposition. The only error is not to be aware of these assumptions; the only illusion is to deny them. The presupposition underlying most forms of psychiatric and psychological approaches in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is the traditional dichotomy between subject and object formulated by Descartes. (p. 78)

Salner (1986) asserts that it is untenable for empiricists to think that the object of study "can be apprehended by the observing researcher in all of its autonomous reality through the use of uncontaminated human perception" (p.110). Phenomenological researchers do not perceive participants to be "objects of study" but rather view the researcher and the participants as interacting.

In addition to becoming aware of presuppositions which may influence data analysis, validity of researchers' written descriptions is achieved through three other procedures (Wertz, 1984). Firstly, the analysis of each individual's experience is verified with that particular person. That is, the researcher consults each participant to determine if they agree with the interpretations. In this way, the subject is not merely an "object of study" but acts as a co-researcher (Colaizzi, 1978). Secondly, the general description of the essential constituents of the experience under study is verified with each participant. This is particularly essential when a particular element of the investigated experience may not be expressed by all of the subjects. Not all of the elements may be mentioned by all of the participants, although when consulted they may affirm them to also be true of their experience. Thirdly, can other individuals, who have also experienced the phenomenon under study, identify with the general description. For example, will other battered women relate to the description of group experience derived from the data of this study?

In addition, researchers may also cross-validate their interpretation of the data by consulting colleagues. As mentioned previously in the preceeding section, another criterion for validity is: will another researcher, given the bracketing and procedure, understand the interpretations of the data (Giorgi, 1975)?

In relation to determining validity, researchers are also concerned with the "representativeness" of the results. That is, can the results be generalized or are the results unique to the participating subjects. Experimental researchers attempt to utilize large samples, employing such procedures as random sampling to achieve representativeness or external validity. Phenomenological researchers may employ quasi-experimental procedures to select subjects whose socio-economic characteristics vary or they may select subjects who are as homogenous as possible (Becker, 1986). However, the most important criterion used in subject selection is that they have experienced the phenomenon being investigated. Wertz (1984) states that the most basic criterion for the choice "is whether a potential subject has or can develop some illuminating relation to the phenomenon under study" (p. 35-36). Unlike natural science research, there is no specific rule on the number of subjects needed for study. Rather, a sufficient number are selected so as to discover the meaning of a particular experience (Colaizzi, 1978).

My Beliefs and Presuppositions

This section presents my foreunderstanding of the group experience of battered women. This awareness is important so as to allow the researcher to suspend her preconceptions while immersing herself in the lived reality of the participants (Wertz, 1984).

Societal attitudes which blame the victim may hinder battered women from sharing their experiences. I believe that self-expression for battered women begins with feeling understood by other women who have had similar experiences.

Counselling groups based on a feminist perspective provide battered women with the opportunity to share their stories, to receive emotional support, to learn from one another, and to grow together. Through their group experience, battered women come to feel better about themselves and other women. They also come to value themselves more as women through the awareness of the prevalence of devaluation and abuse of women in our society. They gain greater awareness of self and others and come to feel less isolated both socially and emotionally. I also believe that counselling women who have been victimized by their husbands should not begin with couple counselling because women are then not given the opportunity to freely express themselves without feeling their husband's domination.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In deciding upon a research methodology, the researcher must determine which approach is most appropriate to answer the research question. Since I wished to study battered women's group counselling experience in its entirety, I chose the phenomenological method. I am interested in understanding women's total group experience as opposed to researching one aspect of their experience such as change in self-esteem.

Wertz (1984) describes three approaches of phenomenologically oriented research: the Comprehensive Theoretical, the Phenomenal, and the Reflective Empirical. The first approach does not utilize a systematic procedure of data analysis but rather attempts to integrate existing theories into an advanced model in order to more fully understand the phenomenon under investigation. The Phenomenal and the Reflective Empirical approaches conduct systematic analyses of the lived-experience. However, the reflective researcher goes beyond the phenomenal researcher by explicitly using "powers of reflection on the data" (Wertz, 1984, p. 32). The phenomenal researcher simply presents the whole range of the constituents of the phenomenon without expanding upon their meaning or relevance. My reflection on the data in this study (i.e. the group experience), which I describe in the next chapter, has resulted in a greater understanding of the growth process for women. The systematic procedure of data analysis I have undertaken in this study is outlined later in this chapter.

Fischer and Wertz (1979) define "empirical" as: "(a) our reflection upon actual events, and to (b) our making available to colleagues the data and steps of analysis that led to our findings - so they might see for themselves whether and how they could come to similar findings" (p. 136). They say "similar" instead of "the same" because interpretation may vary depending on the perspectives of the individual viewer. I have made a tabular presentation of the data in the present study which is contained in the following chapter. I have also included, as an example, the transcription of one of the taped interviews (See Appendix 1) conducted with the participants to show which excerpts I extracted for analysis (the extracted excerpts are underlined). Real names and personal information which could identify the participant have been left out of the transcription.

The guidelines that were followed in conducting this study are derived from Becker (1986), Colaizzi (1978), and Wertz (1984). Before proceeding with data gathering and data analysis, I came to understand my interest in this particular topic which I have described through my personal narrative in Chapter One. I then bracketed my presuppositions of the group counselling experience as I have outlined in Chapter Two. As previously mentioned, it is necessary to be aware of one's values and biases because it is from this position that one sees and interprets. As explained by Polkinghorne (1981), the researcher must "examine, as far as possible, the expectations and prejudgements which he/she holds about the focus of investigation....[so as]....to allow the modes and objects of consciousness to be seen as they are in their original appearance" (p. 7). Therefore, because I view group counselling based on a feminist approach to be a supportive, enriching, and healing experience for battered women, it was important for me to be aware of this bias so that I could be open to hearing any negative experiences.

Participant Selection

I contacted the group facilitators of three different, but similarly conducted, group counselling programs for battered women in Edmonton: the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Edmonton Social Services agencies of Idylwylde and Jasper Place. These three groups were chosen because all of the facilitators have a feminist value orientation (i.e. battering as a result of the devaluation of women; not precipitated because of the women's personalities) and utilize a semi-structured educational and experiential approach. This approach involves prepared presentations by the facilitators as well as learning about self and others through sharing personal experiences. These groups also have similar counselling goals which I outline in my discussion on therapy implications in Chapter 5. Three different groups were selected so as not to focus on the counselling experience in one specific group but to study the experience across a variety of groups which utilize a similar approach.

I informed the group facilitators that I wished to talk to women of various ages; educational backgrounds and; economic status so ~~as~~ to be able to study the phenomenon across different contexts. Four women were self-selected and referred to me by the group facilitators. The women had all participated in a minimum of sixteen group sessions. I decided to talk with women who had been involved in group counselling for a considerable period of time because I felt their descriptions would be rich and would also reveal a therapeutic process. My first contact with these women was done by telephone at which time we arranged our first interview.

Although there is no rule on the number of participants needed for a phenomenological study; a sufficient number is selected so as to discover the pattern of experience (Colaizzi, 1978). I did not find it necessary to interview more than four women because I had found a great deal of similarity among their experiences.

Interview Process

I interviewed the participants rather than ask them to write out their group experience (both procedures are suggested by Colaizzi, 1978) because I thought that through verbal descriptions I could also pay attention to meaning inherent in tone and speed of voice and to specific aspects of experience which are emphasized by the women. In addition, the interview allows for greater rapport and interaction between the researcher and the participants. I conducted the interviews between the period of November, 1986 to March, 1987.

The interview process involved three sessions with each co-researcher: (1) the structuring interview, (2) the data gathering interview, and (3) the corroborative interview (Laferriere, cited in Becker, 1986). The first session was used as an opportunity to build rapport. I shared my personal experiences and the reason for my interest in this study. I chose to be personal because I agree with Oakley (1981) who states that:

> the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. (p. 41)

I also used this session to gather personal information about the co-researcher (i.e. age, educational level, occupation, number of children, length of marriage, marital status, nature of physical abuse, family of origin, number of group sessions attended, and previous help sought). Confidentiality and informed consent were also discussed. A letter outlining this study was given to each participant (See Appendix 2).

The second session was used to acquire information regarding the participants' experiences. I began by stating: "I would like to hear what your experience in the group has been like". I took an unstructured approach so as not to direct the co-researchers' thoughts. I believe that this non-directive approach allowed the women to discuss whatever came to mind. That is, by using this approach, I did not ask questions which may have supported my bias but I paid attention to whatever the participants brought up. Wertz (1984) explains that this non-directive approach helps to avoid generation of researcher-biased data. This session was tape recorded with the permission of the participants.

The third session involved validating my analysis of the data by discussing it with the co-researchers to determine whether they agreed with the analysis. This part of the research process is important for the purpose of ensuring validity. I also believe that it encourages openness by providing reassurance to participants that their experiences will not be misinterpreted and reported inaccurately. All of the women expressed to me that they found this session to be very informative. One woman said that it was good to see her progress in black and white.

Another woman said that it made her feel good to see how much she had changed.

Data Analysis

Listed below are the steps I followed in analyzing the participants' verbal descriptions of their group experience.

1. Each interview was taped and transcribed by myself. As I listened to the tape I paid attention to tone and speed of voice and to those experiences which were emphasized by the women. Colaizzi (1978) refers to this process as "imaginative listening".

2. The transcript was read to get a sense of the person's entire experience. Close attention was paid to statements which were repeated.

3. Excerpts from each transcript were extracted which were relevant to group experience and which were emphasized by the participants (e.g., "What is good about the group is that there aren't any put downs"). I attempted also to select an example of the various experiences related by the women. Repeated excerpts were extracted only once. I have mentioned the repeated excerpts in the individual descriptions in the next chapter.

4. Two levels of abstraction were applied to each excerpt. The first level involves parapharasing the meaning of the participant's words into psychological language. For example, the above mentioned excerpt was paraphrased as follows: Appreciation of supportive atmosphere; absence of

negation of self and others. The second level involves the formulation of a theme which comprises the essence of that particular excerpt. The theme of "perception of supportive atmosphere" was formulated for the above example.

5. The paraphrases (first level abstractions) representing each theme were synthesized into a generalized description of that particular theme. For example, the paraphrases representing the theme of "perception of supportive atmosphere" were combined as follows: Participation involves personal choice; freedom to express feelings and thoughts; absence of negation, judgment, competition, and domination; both joy and pain are shared; respect and validation from others. These generalized descriptions were done for all of the themes within each participant's experience.

6. I validated my analysis of each participant's experience by discussing it with them (on an individual basis) to determine whether they agreed with the analysis. These validation sessions of approximately two hours in duration involved verification of the significance of the extracted excerpts and of the analysis of each excerpt and each generalized description. In addition, the themes which I formulated were agreed upon by two student colleagues.

7. As not all of the themes were mentioned by all of the participants, they were contacted by telephone to determine if those experiences not brought up by them in the

interview were also true of their group experience (all but two of the themes were common to all of the women as will be discussed in the next chapter).

8. Each individual's experience is described as well as the group experience which is common to all of the participants. I chose to focus on individual experiences as well as on the common group experience because I believe that we need to also emphasize the importance of individual stories especially for women who have not felt free to share their stories because of personal shame. Also, by doing an analysis of each woman's experience I in turn was able to provide that to her which appeared to give reassurance to her of her significant personal change and of her significant contribution through sharing her story.

9. The formulated themes, common to each participant, were further clustered into more highly abstracted themes.

The data, as analyzed according to the steps discussed above, are presented in tabular form in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents the individual descriptions of each participant. The descriptions include: personal information; the analysis of each woman's group experience in tabular form; a descriptive paraphrase of her group experience and; an overall synthesis of her experience.

The individual descriptions are presented in the order in which I conducted the interviews and data analysis. Following all of the individual descriptions is a general synthesis of the group experience shared by all of the participants.

Individual Descriptions

Hugette

Personal Information

Hugette is fifty years old and employed part-time as a tour guide. She was raised in rural Alberta and is the eldest of seven siblings. Her father physically abused his wife and children. Hugette recalls running away to her grandmother with whom she stayed from the ages of 3 to 7; and every summer thereafter until her grandmother died when Hugette was 13.

Hugette recently separated from her husband for the first time after 29 years of marriage. They have two children now in their twenties. The first time her husband physically assaulted her was during the ninth year of marriage. His physical assaults (usually consisting of slapping, shoving her out of bed, pushing her into objects, and lifting her from the floor and throwing her down) would occur once every month or two. His assaults became more severe and more frequent following her graduation from university in 1981. Hugette also recalls many occasions of being verbally assailed by her husband starting at the beginning of their relationship. At times he would also destroy her favourite possessions.

In 1966 she saw a male psychiatrist who reassured her that she was not crazy as her husband asserted. In 1973 she saw a female psychiatrist who gave her valium and told her to try harder to make her marriage work. In 1985 she attended several group sessions as an outpatient at the University of Alberta, however she did not find them helpful because her situation was not shared by any of the others. She then phoned the Canadian Mental Health Association and was referred to WIN House who referred her to Edmonton Social Services where she began individiual counselling in June, 1986 and group counselling in August of the same year. She has since been attending group every week.

The excerpts extracted from the interview with Hugette are listed in the first column of Table 1. They appear in the order in which they were presented by Hugette (See Transcribed Interview in Appendix 1).

In column two, directly across from each excerpt in column one, is the first level of abstraction. It involves paraphrasing the meaning of the participant's words into psychological language. Following this abstraction, in column three, is the second level of abstraction which involves the formulation of a theme which reflects the essence of that particular excerpt or experience. The first level of abstractions are clustered according to the themes they represent and a generalized description of each theme is given in Table 2. Following upon, and derived from Tables 1 and 2, is the paraphrase of Hugette's group experience. The numbers shown under each theme in Table 2 indicate the excerpts taken from Table 1.

Table 1
Thematic Abstraction of Hugette's Group Experience

	Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Two Levels of Abstraction 1. Paraphrases	 2. Themes
1.	I had to finally come to grips with being assessed as a battered woman and that was probably the first reality of the whole thing for me.	Realization that acknowledging her victimization is the first step towards change; implies her difficulty identifying herself as a "battered woman."	Recognition of self-direction.
2.	At first I was astounded and hurt that this is where I wound up at and then I found as I listened to them, I was quiet the first night anyway, a lot of them had things to say that were a bit like mine and I could relate to that.	Initially experiences shock; begins to identify with others.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.
3.	What is good about the group is that there aren't any put downs.	Appreciation of supportive atmosphere; absence of negation of self and others.	Perception of supportive atmosphere.
4.	You talk if you like. You don't talk if you don't feel like it.	Atmosphere of respect; participation involves personal choice.	Perception of supportive atmosphere.
5.	I found a lot of support through the group as well as information which I wasn't at all even thinking about or knowing about.	Receives support and gains new knowledge to reflect upon.	Expanded awareness.
6.	It also helps us let off some of our anger because some of us speak out and maybe that is the one place we are allowed to talk; to say it the way we feel like saying it.	Experiences freedom to express self; particularly feelings of anger.	Perception of supportive atmosphere.
7.	They (i.e. the counsellors) help us at times reach some explanations but they're not like teachers running the whole class. Basically we run it ourselves. We are treated as adults and that's the thing that's good about it.	Balanced participation; absence of domination by group facilitators; focus on self-responsibility and independence.	Perception of supportive atmosphere.
8.	They (i.e. the counsellors) will do some research and bring some points for us to think about and maybe see the evolution of women losing their power and losing their place in society and how it evolved over the centuries. That was most informative. I enjoyed that one.	Reflection on the universality of women's suppression; understanding of the wider socio-political context experienced as being valuable.	Expanded awareness.
9.	Even though there is probably a real big gap between the people who have money, some of the women are still married so they still have some money I guess, the feeling is not there of animosity. It doesn't seem to be a competition. You dress as you like, you come in as you like.	Self-conscious about finances; recognizes absence of competition and judgement based on economic differences.	Perception of supportive atmosphere.

10.	I wasn't alone and I wasn't the only one where I thought I was. I really couldn't believe it that there are as many people needing this.	Realization of common experience; surprise expressed that other women need help too.	Comparing self to others.
11.	I guess I didn't want to believe it and I was being evasive or else telling myself I'm really not (i.e. a battered women). I didn't want that label. Nor did I even want to admit to myself that I was actually one of these women and I looked around and I figured that some of these gals are really with it and what are they getting it for (i.e. the battering). They're just genuinely nice women. I found myself feeling a kind of comraderie with them.	Denial at being battered because of stigmatized image of "battered women"; naive notion of justice (i.e. 'bad' things only happen to 'bad' people); perception change of others; comradeship develops.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.
12.	It's also making me realize that I wouldn't be the only one to strike out on my own when I do.	Awareness of not being alone in leaving a marital relationship; aloneness not unique but shared.	Comparing self to others.
13.	They share their stories. They share whatever they have whatever they're able to and that's really rather special.	Appreciation of others sharing their experiences and their decision to express or not to express.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.
14.	I'm sorry to say I've had very few of my friends say I will be here just the same. All of a sudden you're kind of diseased or something.	Experiences lack of empathy and support; isolation.	Evaluating relationships.
15.	I'm amazed and rather disappointed. Maybe I didn't expect it too in hearing this rather avoidance of me now for having expressed my need to be free of this already (i.e. the battering).	Expresses shock that others are not supportive of her desire to make positive changes; experiences alienation.	Evaluating relationships.
16.	At one time it hurt and now I find I'm not surprised because actually if you have a group of ten and if even one is with you, you are lucky.	Discovery of the "true" meaning of friendship.	Evaluating relationships.
17.	These gals here in this group have turned out to be much more significant others now. Whenever you lose some there is always something else that will replace the void.	Awareness that new relationships replace old ones; realization of the positive aspects of change.	Evaluating relationships.
18.	The group has also assisted me in forming contacts with others who like to just sit and talk and I find that is important. I need that kind of stimulus too. I need somebody to rap with once in awhile and not be defensive about it and not be put down.	Appreciation of opportunity to relate; awareness of the need for relationships in which one can be herself without being criticized; suggests lack of such relationships in past.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.
19.	It's a different thing talking with a women and discussing things with a man for some reason.	Developing awareness of the differences in relating to women and to men; women express feelings.	Evaluating relationships.

20.	It's unreal how we detach ourselves when we are not really wanting to see that much.	Recognizes the commonness of denying victimization.	Expanded awareness.
21.	Although I may threaten I wind up backing down. I don't carry out with my words because I feel sorry or I get intimidated.	Fear overcomes desire for self-direction.	Recognition of self-direction.
22.	I can't see any signs of concern about me (i.e. from husband). And I don't think he's had any attachment or any real—I mean I was useful really. It was probably worthwhile keeping me.	Contemplates the "true" meaning of marriage.	Evaluating relationships.
23.	I didn't have quite the same comebacks to him that I do now.	Development of assertiveness.	Enhancement of personal power.
24.	I stayed in it (i.e. the marriage) because I felt worthless. I couldn't think of anybody else seeing anything in me.	Recognition that a poor self-concept inhibits change and prevents the initiation of new relationships.	Recognition of self-direction.
25.	It gave me a chance to role-play abit and get some feathers in my own cap and maybe get just a little bit of strength from these people in the fact that they were courageous and maybe I could be courageous and not just a doormat as I was.	Self-confidence enhanced through role-playing; others inspire self-assertion and feelings of hope.	Enhancement of personal power.
26.	I don't know what I was doing it for (i.e. being passive in marriage) and it kind of makes me angry.	Some anger at self for lack of assertion and accepting the traditional role of wife.	Recognition of self-direction.
27.	But now I'm not so apt to take it (i.e. abuse from husband) and maybe that's why more of these assaults have come out because it disturbs him when I tell him things.	Associates her assertiveness with an increase in husband's violence.	Evaluating relationships.
28.	I'm not exactly as afraid. They have told me where and how there are places to go to if you need them.	Fear lessens through awareness of safe places.	Enhancement of personal power.
29.	There are ways of getting to the things you want. I'm not saying that they're going to do it for me but at least they can steer me into the right direction.	Recognition that attaining goals is ultimate responsibility of self; others provide assistance.	Recognition of self-direction.
30.	I've also discovered that most of us who are in there have really almost all gone much the same sort of route. It's just that I'm not the only one who thought that way. It's just that I am one of the weird ones because I have stayed in it (i.e. the marriage) so long.	Recognition of shared and unique experiences.	Comparing self to others.
31.	If it (i.e. the marriage) goes awry it just goes awry. It's not the end of the world.	View on marital dissolution changes; not catastrophic.	Change in world-view.
32.	It was a foolish thing I was doing to try and make it float.	Gains insight into her way of being in her marriage.	Increased self-awareness.

33.	I'm not that afraid of being left alone or having to face more of alone. I've rehearsed that fairly well, I think to the point where there isn't really anything to hang in for (i.e. in the marriage).	Less fear of aloneness; feels ready for change.	Recognition of self-direction.
34.	I am healthier since I've been coming to the group because I used to get these unreal, really severe gut pains. I'm not having as many. Maybe I have a more healthier outlet.	Sees an association between the group and her physical well-being.	Increased self-awareness.
35.	My highest times for them (i.e. gut pains) was around him and I guess I was holding back alot. Instead of verbalizing anything in return I just sort of clam up and take it and take it and take it.	Recognizes a relationship between physical symptoms and not expressing self.	Increased self-awareness.
36.	I have seen a rather low person coming in feeling quite low and almost showing it all over themselves and then they come in maybe two weeks later and they are all spiffied up. You can't help but comment to them. I don't know how I appeared to them, they haven't really told me, but I feel better.	Notices transformation in others through improved physical appearance; communicates her perceptions; wonders about herself.	Comparing self to others.
37.	I used to really use the put down on myself the dumping on myself routine. Now I find I hold back on those.	Perceived positive change in self-worth.	Increased self-awareness.
38.	I think if it came down to it we would help each other out. I haven't yet reached out for that.	Hope for relationship and mutual support outside of group setting.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.
39.	I really don't know what they feel about me. Maybe they don't feel the same way about me, I don't know, but I think on the whole they let me in anyway.	Focus on belongingness; wonders about perceptions of others.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.
40.	They've helped me accept myself as I am with the features that I have including my big nose and crooked teeth. They certainly don't act ashamed about things like that. That's kind of nice and it's good for me because I have alot of inhibitions about things.	Acceptance of physical appearance facilitated through seeing that others are not self-conscious; freedom to be less inhibited.	Enhancement of self-acceptance.
41.	Most of the people here, they have something beautiful about each one of them, and the fact is we're all women but we're not clones. We can't be clones and that's special.	Realization of the specialness and uniqueness of self and other women.	Comparing self to others.
42.	I can finally say this is what I'm like and this is what I am and this is what you get when you see me and that's all.	Acceptance of self facilitates freedom to be herself without needing the approval of others.	Enhancement of self-acceptance.
43.	I can accept them as they are and not feel that I can change them either and we have to be what we are.	Increased respect for individuality; acceptance of others as they are; recognition that change does not happen from the outside.	Increased self-awareness.

44. What we say may not be earth shaking news but at least we are listened to and I think it adds strength to the person because I think for my part it lets us know that, yes, we're not all sociologists, but we certainly have ways of explaining things too.	Feelings of inferiority; being listened to validates her as a person.	Enhancement of personal power.
45. I don't know if other people have experienced a similar sort of initial impact about it. You sort of go through a spiral of feelings in that first day in particular.	Wonders if others share her emotional confusion.	Comparing self to others.
46. I felt quite ashamed that I was going to have to admit this too (i.e. being battered) like it was somehow a degradation in a way and then I got thinking—hardly; I mean those are people who are survivors.	Shift in perspective; from negative to positive view of self and other "battered women" through seeing their strength.	Change in world-view.
47. They've been degraded but they're coming out of it and they're on the road to recovery and so will I recover as well.	Self-confidence and hope are inspired through seeing the "healing" process of others.	Enhancement of personal power.
48. I am not blaming myself as much now. I can see the guilt trips when some people try to lay them on me like even this one about "you're all he's got". I don't buy those as easily now as I used to.	Introjection of others' projections; greater ability to recognize and cope with feelings of guilt; new perception of responsibility.	Recognition of self-direction.
49. I used to feel I had to please the world. I don't really feel that way now.	Move from "pleaser" to independence; awareness of self-growth.	Recognition of self-direction.
50. I have fun in the group sometimes. Sometimes we can just laugh and that's another nice thing. There are times when we can actually laugh and laugh to the point where we almost can get tears in our eyes from laughing and it's acceptable. You're not crazy because you're laughing. Maybe it's tension release or whatever.	Enjoys fun in the group without feeling judged; suggests laughter is uncommon to her; implies apprehension and unpredictability.	Perception of supportive atmosphere.
51. We have crying times too. Not everyone cries at once but some do.	Pain and hurt is expressed and shared; permission to be human; vulnerability is acceptable.	Perception of supportive atmosphere.
52. I may ponder the idea and rehearse it and then something shows up or comes upon the scene and I will make a decision and it's that type of thing that happens with me.	Awareness of her process in making decisions.	Increased self-awareness.
53. Generally I come out of those things (i.e. making changes) anyway so I'm not that afraid of the swim either. I've even considered maybe I should start looking around for a place. I don't know what mine is going to be like (i.e. marital separation). That is sort of the unknown yet.	Self-confidence in making a change is fostered through remembering positive experiences in her past; fear of the unknown.	Enhancement of personal power.

54.	Because I have a more inhibited nature I would be able to discuss more intimate things with an individual compared to the group. That's probably my most hangup I would have or to really talk openly. Maybe in time it will go away.	Awareness of "holding back" in the group; recognition that the process of "opening up" involves time.	Increased self-awareness.
55.	What was also not so good about him (i.e. the psychiatrist) was the fact that he was a big man and he spun around in his chair and came to face me and told me just bang, bang, bang, all these things. If they (i.e. the group) would have all kind of opened their mouths and attacked me at once I would have probably run away too. I mean I left from there (i.e. the psychiatrist's office) as quickly as I could.	Appreciation of others' respect; recognizes that intense confrontation creates defensiveness.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.

Table 2
Higher Order Thematic Descriptions of Hugette's Group Experience

	Thematic Clusters	Generalized Descriptions
1.	Realizations of Self-Other Reciprocity (Excerpt Nos. from Table 1: 2, 11, 13, 18, 38, 39, 55)	Stigmatized image of other "battered women" creates distance between self and others; perception of others changes through finding them to be likeable; feelings of comradeship arise from identifying with others; appreciation of opportunity to listen and relate; mutual respect demonstrated; recognition of need for supportive relationships; desire for belongingness.
2.	Perception of Supportive Atmosphere (3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 50, 51)	Participation involves personal choice; freedom to express feelings and thoughts; absence of negation, judgement, competition, and domination; both joy and pain are shared; respect and validation from others.
3.	Increased Self-Awareness (32, 34, 35, 37, 52, 54)	Understands personal process of decision-making and her way of being in her marital relationship; notices improvement in self-worth and physical health; sees an association between physical well-being and self-expression; recognizes the degree of her openness; increased respect for individuality.
4.	Enhancement of Self-Acceptance (40, 42)	Accepting herself as she is gives her the freedom to be herself without needing the approval of others; accepting her physical self is facilitated through seeing the unself-consciousness of others.
5.	Comparing Self to Others (10, 12, 30, 36, 41, 45)	Recognizes similarities and differences in experiences; realizes the specialness and uniqueness of self and others; observes transformation in others (i.e. physical evidence) and wonders about self; questions whether her emotional confusion is shared by others.
6.	Expanded Awareness (5, 8, 20, 43)	New learning and reflection on the universality of women's suppression; recognizes the commonness of denying victimization.
7.	Enhancement of Personal Power (23, 25, 28, 44, 47, 53)	Self-confidence, assertiveness, and hope are inspired by supportive behavior of others and through remembering one's own successful experiences; fear lessens through awareness of safe environments.
8.	Recognition of Self-Direction (1, 21, 24, 26, 29, 33, 48, 49)	Acknowledging victimization is first step towards change; anger at self for accepting traditional roles; poor self-concept and fear inhibits desire for change (i.e. initiating new relationships); accepting aloneness and rejecting guilt trips of others prepares one to make changes (i.e. leaving a marital relationship); attaining goals is self-responsibility; move from "pleaser" to independence reflects personal growth.
9.	Evaluating Relationships (14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, 27)	Experiencing isolation and lack of support leads to contemplation of the "true" meaning of friendship and of marriage; new relationships replace old ones; experiences differences relating to men and to women (i.e. women more expressive of feelings).
10.	Change in World-view (31, 46)	Marital dissolution no longer viewed as being catastrophic; initial negative view of "battered women" changes to positive one through seeing their strength.

Paraphrase of Hugette's Group Experience

The first session is very significant for Hugette because she experiences a positive shift in her thoughts and feelings about herself and other physically abused women. She initially holds a stigmatized image: she believes that bad things happen only to bad people. Then, as she listens to the other women, she discovers that: "they're just genuinely nice women". Through their sharing, she also comes to see their strength (e.g., "like it was somehow a degradation in a way and then I got thinking--hardly; I mean these are people who are survivors").

She identifies with them and moves from experiencing shock at finding herself with other "classified" women, to feelings of comraderie (e.g., "At first I was astounded and hurt that this is where I wound up at and then I found as I listened to them ... a lot of them had things to say that were a bit like mine and I could relate to that"). She realizes that many other women have been physically assaulted by their husbands and need help too. She wonders if they also share her emotional confusion (e.g., "I don't know if other people have experienced a similar sort of intial impact about it. You sort of go through a spiral of feelings in that first day in particular"). As well as recognizing and wondering about the similarities between the other women and herself, she also appreciates the differences (e.g., "Most of the people here, they have something beautiful about each one of them and the fact is we're all women but we're not clones").

Assessing the other women to be "nice"; and thus recognizing that unattractive characteristics in the women did not cause their husbands to assault them, helps Hugette to acknowledge her victimization. This is the first step to taking control of her own life. She realizes that since her husband is not attempting to change his behavior, she has to take responsibility to end her vicitimization by leaving the marriage. She notices that she would not be the only one to leave her marriage; others have also left.

Although she realizes that she would not be alone in her decision to leave and that other women will support her, she recognizes that the decision is her responsibility. It is part of the process of learning to make decisions (e.g., "I may ponder the idea and rehearse it and then something shows up or comes upon the scene and I will make a decision and it's that type of thing that happens with me").

She expresses anger at herself for accepting the traditional role of wife without question which was again an indication to her that her life was being controlled from the outside rather than by herself. She recognizes her move from "pleaser" to independent (e.g., "I used to feel I had to please the world. I don't really feel that way now"). The increase in her self-confidence and assertiveness is inspired by seeing the strength of the other women (e.g., "they were courageous and maybe I could be courageous and not just a doormat as I was"). Her personal power is also enhanced through remembering successful experiences in her past. She observes a positive physical transformation in others and sees it as a sign of heightened self-esteem. Although she feels better about herself, she still wonders if others have noticed any improvement in her physical appearance. Seeing the healing process of the other women instills hope in her own growth (e.g., "They've been degraded but they're coming out of it and they're on the road to recovery and so will I recover as well").

Hugette recognizes that she experiences ambivalence about leaving her marriage because of a fear of not earning enough money to support herself. However, she realizes that money is not the only issue; she also stays because of poor self-perception and fear of being rejectd and alone (e.g., "I stayed in it because I felt worthless. I couldn't think of anybody else seeing anything in me"). Her fear of being alone lessens; drawing her closer to decide upon marital separation (e.g., "I'm not that afraid of being left alone or having to face more of alone"). She also notices that she is now more able to ignore the unsupportive responses of her family and friends (e.g., "I can see the guilt trips when some people try to lay them on me like even this one about 'you're all he's got'. I don't buy those as easily now as I used to"). She no longer views marital dissolution as catastrophic (e.g., "If it goes awry it just goes awry. It's not the end of the world"). She also gains a greater understanding of what a good marriage should be like and realizes that her marriage is unsatisfactory because her husband is not supportive of her (e.g., "I can't see any signs of concern about me"). At the time of our second interview Hugette was living with her husband but was feeling more confident about leaving. She was separated from her husband at the time of our third session which was three months later.

She finds that she has stopped the "dumping on myself routine" and comes to accept herself as she is without needing approval from others (e.g., "I can finally say this is what I'm like and this is what I am and this is what you get when you see me and that's all"). Acceptance of her physical appearance is facilitated through acceptance by the other women and also by seeing that they are not self-conscious about their appearance (e.g., "They've helped me accept myself as I am with the features that I have including my big nose and crooked teeth. They certainly don't act ashamed about things like that"). Hugette also notices an improvement in her physical health since she began attending the group (e.g., "I am healthier since I've been coming to the group because I used to get these unreal, really severe gut pains. I'm not having as many. Maybe I have a more healthier outlet"). She also recognizes a relationship between her physical symptoms and her lack of freedom to express herself (e.g., "My highest times for them (i.e. gut pains) was around him and I guess I was holding back a lot").

Not only is Hugette's awareness of herself and of the other women enhanced, but also her awareness of the larger socio-political system. She gains new insight into the historical perspective of the status of women (e.g., "they (the group facilitators) will do some research and bring some points for us to think about and maybe see the evolution of women losing their power and losing their place in society and how it evolved over the centuries"). She perceives the universality of the suppression and domination of women in our society.

Hugette experiences alienation and isolation from her family and friends after telling them she wants to leave her husband because he is abusive (e.g., "I'm sorry to say I've had very few of my friends say I will be here just the same. All of a sudden you're kind of diseased or something"). She is aware that the women in the group are much more supportive (e.g., "These gals here in this group have turned out to be much more significant others now").

She comes to realize the "true" meaning of friendship; that it involves mutual support and encouragement. Also developing is the understanding that new friendships come into being from giving up old ones (e.g., "whenever you lose some, there is always something that will replace the void"). She hopes for support and relationship with these women outside of the group setting (e.g., "I think if it came down to it we would help each other out. I haven't yet reached out for that").

Hugette perceives that the supportive atmosphere of the group facilitates self-expression, particularly feelings of anger (e.g., "It also helps us let off some of our anger because some of us speak out and maybe that is the one place we are allowed to talk, to say it the way we feel like saying it"). Both joy and pain are also shared (e.g., "there are times when we can actually laugh and laugh to the point where we almost can get tears in our eyes .... not everyone cries at once but some do").

The group fulfills her need to relate without fear of being criticized (e.g., "I need somebody to rap with once in awhile and not be defensive about it and not be put down"). Her feelings of inferiority lessen and she feels validated through the attentiveness of the other women (e.g., "we are listened to and I think it adds strength to the person because I think for my part it lets us know that, yes, we're not all sociologists, but we certainly have ways of explaining things too"). She notices that relating with women as compared to men involves more emotional expression. She realizes that she is more open in a one to one relationship; however, she expects that she will become more open in the group over time.

Hugette also recognizes that: active participation involves personal choice; group facilitators do not dominate the discussion; participation is balanced between group members; and there is an absence of derogation, and a lack of judgement and competition based on economic status (e.g., "Even though there is probably a real big gap between the people who have money .... It doesn't seem to be a competition. You dress as you like, you come in as you like"). Hugette also appreciates the respect she is shown by the other women as she recalls a previous experience in a psychiatrist's office:

> he spun around in his chair and came to face me and told me just bang, bang, bang, all these things. If they (i.e. the women in the group) would have all opened their mouths and attacked me at once I would have probably run away too.

Excerpts which were repeated two or more times by Hugette reflected her difficulty in identifying herself as a battered woman (e.g., "I had to finally come to grips with being assessed as a battered woman"); her contemplation of leaving her marriage (e.g., "I wouldn't be the only one to strike out on my own when I do"); her lack of support from family and friends; and her recognition of the support she received from the other women in the group. The themes most focused on by Hugette were recognition of self-direction; followed by perception of supportive atmosphere, realization of self-other reciprocity, and heightened evaluation of relationships. These primary themes of Hugette's experience are reflected in the following synthesis of her experience.

Overall Syntheis of Hugette's Process

Through interacting with supportive women, Hugette experiences a process of education about self, others, relationships, and society. This facilitates significant changes in perception. She acquires a more positive image of herself and other physically assaulted women. She finds the other women in the group to be likeable which helps her to identify herself as a battered woman. This is her first step toward ending her victimization. She moves from other-directedness to self-direction and contemplates the termination of her marital relationship. Her experience in the group becomes her new reference point from which to evaluate her relationships outside of the group as well as the previous help she received from counselling professionals.

Michele

Personal Information

Michele is 43 years old and employed as a school consultant for the past six years. Her father, an alcoholic, was physically and sexually abusive to her. Her earliest recollection of sexual abuse began when she was four years old. He was abusive until she attempted suicide at age thirteen. She also related that she is now remembering more of the times she was molested by her father. She does not recall him being physically abusive of her mother or two younger brothers.

Michele has been separated for the past year from her common-law husband of four years who became physically abusive during the second year of their relationship. She described three incidents of his physical violence which involved pushing her down on the floor; shoving her out of the bed while she was asleep and; attempting to run his car into her. She related that she attempted suicide a week after the third incident. His violence also involved raping her and destroying her personal possessions.

Michele has two teenage daughters from her previous marriage of seventeen years. Her first husband was not physically assaultive but was emotionally abusive (i.e. name calling and constant criticism of her abilities as a mother).

She also related that she is taking prescriptive drugs for anxiety and has been involved in counselling with psychiatrists for the past seven years. She attended her first group session in February 1986 but did not begin attending regularly until June 1986. She was informed of the groups at Edmonton Social Services by WIN House and is still attending at the present time.

The excerpts extracted from the transcribed interview with Michele, and the analysis of each excerpt, are presented in Table 3. Following upon, and derived from Tables 3 and 4, is the paraphrase of Michele's group experience. Table 4 presents a clustering of the first level abstractions from Table 3, representing the same theme, into a generalized description of that particular theme. The numbers shown under each theme in Table 4 indicate the excerpts taken from Table 3.

Table 3
Thematic Abstraction of Michele's Group Experience

	Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Two Levels of Abstraction 1. Paraphrases	 2. Themes
1.	I was doing alot to even make sure that I maybe didn't get to the group. I was feeling ashamed like I was going to have to identify myself as a battered woman.	Holds a stimatized image of "battered women"; shame of self forestalls group attendance.	Realization of distance between self and other "battered women."
2.	I can say it (i.e. a battered woman) now but to feel it hurts way too much.	Awareness of intellectual vs. emotional acceptance of being victimized; recognition of deep hurt.	Increased self-awareness.
3.	I was thinking he beats me up and now I have to go to this therapy group. Like something is backwards. I didn't do anything wrong. How come it's me that has to go. I was feeling angry by the time I got there.	Shame changes to anger through recognizing the unjustness of "needing" therapy; awareness of not being responsible for her victimization.	Increased self-awareness.
4.	The very first woman I saw was fat, no make-up, stringy hair. All of a sudden they looked the same and I didn't belong here and I scrunched into myself.	First observation confirms her stereotyped image; immediate judgement of others; feelings of unbelongingness; realization of withdrawal into self.	Realization of distance between self and other "battered women."
5.	It was hard for me too because I didn't want anybody to know what I did for a job. I mean if I was supposed to be helping other people how come I couldn't help myself.	Holds back from disclosing her occupation; negative judgement of self; fear of judgement and non-acceptance by others.	Perception of "openness."
6.	In the coffee room we were our normal selves which certainly didn't live up to what we should be or could be.	Experiences more "humanness" in less structured settings; perception of expectation to focus on personal development.	Perception of "openness."
7.	A young woman was forthright in the large group and very open and so that helped alot of us be the same way in the small group.	Openness of others encourages personal sharing; risk-taking is self-decision.	Perception of "openness."
8.	I don't feel like I can impose on them. I feel like I couldn't reciprocate or might not be able to if they did come to really rely on me.	Feelings of being a burden to others; questions the likelihood of mutual support outside of group setting; implies responsibility for others.	Recognition of responsibility.
9.	I labelled myself as a battered woman beginning at the age of nine.	Awareness of history of being victimized.	Increased self-awareness.
10.	Every once in awhile there were people (i.e. in her childhood) who didn't do a hell of alot but what they did do helped me hang on to sanity.	Victimization during childhood is validated but not prevented through supportive actions of others.	Evaluating relationships (perception of self-other relationships).

11.	Now I can look back and see all the denial and how pathological my family was.	Realization of unsupportive family.	Evaluating relationships.
12.	It was a long time in the group before I talked about the incest group I was going to.	Self-perception; revealing personal information involves time.	Perception of "openness."
13.	I didn't indicate that was my personal history (i.e. sexually abused by father) but I told her how it could happen and how devastating it is for the little girl.	Self-decision to share personal history; informs others based on personal experience.	Perception of "openness."
14.	We are at so many different stages.	Recognition that self and others are at differing phases in marital relationships; from dependence to independence.	Comparing self to others (awareness of differences in relationship stages).
15.	It's nice to learn about this and that and being assertive but it was more in the coffee room that we'd say this is what it is really like. I can't keep away from him, I don't know why, it's driving me nuts, I know it's crazy, I'm so ashamed of it.	Appreciation of help with self-development; experiences more truthful sharing of dependencies and vulnerabilities while socializing with the other women.	Perception of "openness" (more authenticity in informal setting).
16.	All we need is somebody talking straight about where things are really at for them.	Honest openness is most valuable characteristic in relating.	Evaluating relationships (positive valuation of authenticity).
17.	One of the best experiences I had recently was a woman who is getting a divorce. While he (i.e. her husband) was all in his remorse she acquired the furniture and he has offered her a new car and a trip to Hawaii. I said right on C. good for you.	Seeing others get what they want inspires personal strength and lessens guilt; another behaves to please herself and not to avoid judgement from others.	Enhancement of personal power.
18.	I have some trouble buying some of the information by Lenore Walker. It's a bit too pat. I've experienced it (i.e. cycle of violence) a lot more unpredictably.	Recognizes unique experiences of self; her experience of being assaulted not consistent with reported experiences in the literature.	Increased self-awareness (awareness of individual differences in experience of battering).
19.	The information was helpful if I could apply it to myself.	Evaluates information; most valuable if she can identify with it.	Increased self-awareness.
20.	I'm less ashamed than I was a year ago.	Awareness of the diminution of her shame.	Enhancement of self-acceptance.
21.	The things I learned helped me with that little boy who was acting up at school with how best to approach the family.	Knowledge gained in group is applied in her counselling work.	Expanded awareness.
22.	I'm seeing shit everywhere and I can't stand seeing it anymore.	Expanded awareness of the commonness of human violation arouses anger, despair, and helplessness.	Expanded awareness (emotional repercussions).

23.	How is it that these men (i.e. father and husband) feel closer to each other than their own flesh and blood? How is it that they can recognize each other? Maybe the rest of us should get in on how they see it so we could take a look and steer away right at the beginning.	Lack of support from father and husband; observes their comradeship; implies feelings of betrayal; desires the ability to recognize abusive men to prevent entering into a relationship with them.	Assessing men.
24.	I've been helped by the older women in the group to see what it was like for her (i.e. mother) forty years ago. It helped me be a little bit more compassionate in my hatred towards my mother.	Increased understanding of women's suppression; development of empathy for mother.	Expanded awareness.
25.	There has been some memorable occassions in the group. One was seeing the film, "Behind the Veil". That was excellent. The gentleness that these nuns could bring to human problems and their compassion; it helped me feel better about being a woman.	Enhanced awareness of the caring qualities of women; heightened appreciation of self as a woman.	Heightened valuation of self and other women.
26.	We (i.e. daughter and she) felt quite at home about making our own interpretation after reading the Book of Genesis. Our image indicates a plurality for God.	Shares new spiritual understanding with daughter; perception of God as being both male and female.	Expanded awareness.
27.	The pastor's wife had the courage to say that what she likes best about Christmas is the Mother Mary and how important she was. The pastor asked how many of you believe that we don't give Mary the credit that she deserves. No one responded except me. It just came automatically and I said out loud "Right on".	Freely expresses appreciation of women in situations outside of the group; suggests personal feelings of being unappreciated; implies shock at her outspoken behavior.	Heightened valuation of self and other women.
28.	A lovely Anglican minister said that God would be anguished that one of his precious creations was causing harm to another of his precious creations.	Appreciates the emphasis on the "wrongness" of physical abuse; people are to be valued.	Expanded awareness.
29.	I, for one, immediately responded to his (i.e. male guest speaker) "machoness". There was something about his body language that just turned me off. His posture was confirmed by his first statement to us. He said one thing I can never figure out is why do you women stay.	Realization of immediate negative response to stereotypical masculine behavior; image confirmed through his lack of empathy and understanding.	Assessing men.
30.	I'm only just now giving it (i.e. her body) much attention. People like D. (counsellor) pointed out how much pain and discomfort I'm willing to explain away and never even think of asking for help and things like her giving me cookies and juice with vitamins in it. I always take the juice not the coffee.	Realization of lack of self-nurturance; neglect of physical well-being; receives message that "you're worth it"; concern from others encourages self-care.	Realization of lack of self-nurturance.

31.	I really don't think I had any clue about how to look after myself. And I also didn't even feel as if I had permission to do that. But I see that (i.e. not taking care of self) in my mother too.	Recognizes that she has not learned how to care for herself; received message that it is not okay to have needs; awareness of similarity with mother; suggests lack of nurturance and encouragement from mother.	Realization of lack of nurturance.
32.	I had a big sense that he (i.e. father) didn't love me anymore and I don't know why that had happened and maybe he had never loved me in the first place. Love is the water and the sunshine and the protection. And it's forming ties and belonging.	Attempts to understand her childhood victimization as resulting from her father's absence of love for her; contemplates the "true" meaning of love.	Evaluating relationships.
33.	I've learnt from the group how we as women are sold a number of ridiculous bills of goods which destroy our sense of self. It's a kind of brainwashing so that we end up with very little sense of self. That is the way they (i.e. patriarchal society) want us to be because having one's own needs would take away nurturing time from others.	Awareness of the negative aspects (i.e. lack of self-identity and self-nurturance) of traditional socialization on women.	Expanded awareness.
34.	I'm starting to have a self.	Awareness of developing self-worth and self-direction.	Increased self-awareness and self-acceptance.

Table 4
Higher Order Thematic Descriptions of Michele's Group Experience

	Thematic Clusters	Generalized Descriptions
1.	Realization of Distance between Self and Other "Battered Women" (Excerpt Nos. from Table 3: 1, 4)	Stigmatized image of "battered women" and self-shame forestalls contact with other "battered women"; stereotyped image of physical appearance is confirmed by first observation of one another; immediate judgement generalized to others; feelings of unbelongingness arise; withdrawal of self occurs; distance between self and others is increased.
2.	Increased Self-Awareness (2, 3, 9, 18, 19, 20, 34)	Recognizes the differences in intellectual vs. emotional acceptance of being victimized; emotional focus arouses deep pain; awareness of the unjustness of "needing" therapy through realization of not being responsible for being victimized; awareness of history of being victimized since childhood; personal experiences of victimization not always similar to reported experiences in the literature; information which enhances self-identification is most valuable; awareness of less shame of self and development of self-worth and self-direction.
3.	Recognition of Responsibility (8)	Questions the degree of responsibility to others outside of the group setting; feelings of being a burden and being burdened by others raises doubt of reciprocal support.
4.	Perception of "Openness" (5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 15)	Personal "openness is hampered by negative self-judgement and by fear of judgement and non-acceptance by others; experiences more sincere sharing of dependencies and vulnerabilities in less structured settings (i.e. coffee room) because focus is not on personal development; self-disclosure is personal decision but is facilitated through "openness" of others; knowledge gained through personal experiences can be shared without revealing personal history; personal sharing increases over time.
5.	Evaluating Relationships (10, 11, 16, 32)	Realization of lack of support in family of origin; supportive actions of others in her childhood did not prevent abuse from father but validated her experience; honest openness is viewed as most valuable characteristic in relationships.
6.	Comparing Self to Others (14)	Recognizes that self and others are at different stages in their marital relationships; movement from dependence to independence.
7.	Enhancement of Personal Power (17)	Feelings of personal strength and confidence are inspired through seeing others attain their goals; guilt lessens through seeing that others are self-directed; decisions not based on fear of judgement.
8.	Expanded Awareness (21, 22, 24, 26, 28, 33)	Expanded awareness of the prevalence of violation of others arouses anger, despair, and helplessness; appreciates the emphasis on the "wrongness" of physical abuse; increased understanding of women's suppression enhances empathy for her mother; increased awareness of the negative effects (i.e. lack of self-identity and nurturance) of traditional socialization on women; new spiritual understanding (i.e. perception of God as both male and female) is shared with daughter; applies knowledge gained in group to her work as a counsellor.

9.	Assessing Men (23, 29)	Realizes that her father and husband are more supportive of each other than they are of her; feels betrayed; desires the ability to recognize abusive men to prevent entering into a relationship with them; recognizes her dislike of a male guest speaker because of his "macho" physical appearance and his lack of empathy and understanding of women's victimization.
10.	Heightened Valuation of Self and Other Women (25, 27)	Experiences a lack of appreciation from others outside of the group; appreciation of self as a woman is heightened through expanded awareness of the caring qualities of women; experiences new behavior of freely expressing appreciation of women in everyday situations.
11.	Realization of Lack of Nurturance (30, 31)	Recognizes that she has not learned how to take care of herself because self-nurturance was not encouraged; recognizes that her mother does not take care of herself either; realization of self-neglect of physical well-being facilitated through the concern of others; care from others encourages self-care and self-appreciation.

Paraphrase of Michele's Group Experience

Michele was initially reluctant to attend (e.g., "I was doing a lot to even make sure that I maybe didn't get to the group"). She feels ashamed but notices that she is feeling angry by the time she gets there (e.g., "I was thinking he beats me up and now I have to go to this therapy group. Like something is backwards. I didn't do anything wrong").

The first woman she sees is physically unattractive and so she makes an immediate judgment that all of the others fit her stigmatized image of a battered woman. She withdraws into herself and anxiously awaits the time to leave; she does not feel like she belongs (e.g., "The very first woman I saw was fat, no make-up, stringy hair. All of a sudden they looked the same and I didn't belong here and I scrunched into myself"). Her poor opinion of herself and her fear of negative judgment and non-acceptance by the other women also hinders her participation. She explains: "It was hard for me too because I didn't want anybody to know what I did for a job. I mean if I was supposed to be helping other people how come I couldn't help myself".

However, she discovers that the other women do not criticize her but show their concern for her emotional and physical well-being. The group facilitators do little things such as "giving me cookies and juice with vitamins in it". Seeing the concern of the other women causes Michele to be concerned about her health and she begins to take better care of her body (e.g., "I'm only just now giving it much attention"). Michele validated the above interpretation by stating that she finally received the message: "you're worth it". She also realizes that she has not taken care of herself because learning how to do this was not part of her or her mother's upbringing (e.g., "I really don't think I had any clue about how to look after myself. And I also didn't even feel as if I had permission to do that. But I see that in my mother too").

During one session the group watches a film called "Behind the Veil" which extols feminine qualities such as caring. Through seeing the feminine quality of caring as a positive trait, Michele values being a woman (e.g., "The gentleness that these nuns could bring to human problems and their compassion; it helped me feel better about being a woman"). Her heightened valuation of herself as a woman leads to freer expression of her appreciation of women. One day in church she responded positively to the pastor's question of whether more respect should be shown to the Virgin Mary: "It just came automatically and I said outloud 'Right on'".

Michele openly shares thoughts about her dependency on her husband and vulnerabilites when she is socializing with the other women in the coffee room. She feels that she and the other women can be more authentic in the coffee room because the focus is not on enhancing personal growth (e.g., "It's nice to learn about this and that and being assertive but it was more in the coffee room that we'd say this is what it is really like").

She recognizes that self-disclosure is a personal decision. However, greater personal sharing is facilitated by seeing others take the risk of being open (e.g., "A young woman was forthright in the large group and very open and so that helped a lot of us be the same way"). Michele shares knowledge she gains through her life experiences without revealing her personal history until she is ready (e.g., "I didn't indicate that was my personal history but I told her how it could happen and how devasting it is for the little girl"). She stated that it took her a long time in the group before she disclosed that she was sexually abused by her father.

Michele's personal sharing increases over time and the initial distance she created between herself and the other women lessens. She views sincere openness as being the most valuable characteristic in relating (e.g., "All we need is somebody talking straight about where things are really at for them"). She holds back from interacting because of feelings of being a burden and being burdened by others: she questions the likelihood of reciprocal support, and the degree of her responsibility to the other women, outside of the group setting (e.g., "I don't feel like I can impose on them. I feel like I couldn't reciprocate or might not be able to if they did come to really rely on me").

Michele's heightened awareness of the prevalence of physical violence towards women and children arouses feelings of anger. During our validation session she also spoke of feelings of despair and helplessness. She applies the new knowledge she gains about the victimization process in her professional work (e.g., "The things I learned helped me with that little boy who was acting up at school, with how best to approach that family"). She appreciates the emphasis on the "wrongness" of human violation. She also gains a greater understanding of the negative aspects of traditional female socialization:

> I've learnt from the group how we, as women, are sold a number of ridiculous bills of goods which destroy our sense of self .... That is the way they (i.e. patriarchal society) want us to be because having one's own needs would take away nurturing time from others.

Listening to the older women in the group has helped her to feel less anger and more empathy for her mother (e.g., "I've been helped by the older women in the group to see what it was like for her forty years ago. It helped me be a little bit more compassionate in my hatred towards my mother"). Michele also gains a new spiritual understanding which she shares with her daughter; that God is both male and female (e.g., "We felt quite at home about making our own interpretation after reading the Book of Genesis. Our image indicates a plurality for God").

Michele realizes her history of victimization since childhood and recognizes the pathology in her family of origin: her physical and sexual abuse by her father was kept a family secret. Occasionally she received some support as a child which helped to validate her feelings that her father's behavior was wrong (e.g., "Every once in a while there were people who didn't do a hell of a lot but what they did do helped me hang on to sanity"). She attempts to understand why her father abused her and resolves that love involves nurturance not abuse (e.g., "I had a big sense that he didn't love me anymore ... maybe he had never loved me in the first place. Love is the water and the sunshine and the protection"). She continues to find it difficult to understand why her father's violence was only directed towards her. She notices that her father and husband are more supportive of each other than they are of her which leaves her feeling betrayed.

Michele wants to be able to recognize abusive men in order to avoid entering into a relationship with them. She begins to assess the characteristics of men. She notices her dislike of a male guest speaker because of his "machoness" and his lack of understanding of why women do not immediately separate from an abusive partner (e.g., "There was something about his body language that just turned me off. His posture was confirmed by his first statement to us").

Michele recognizes that she can acknowledge her victimization without feeling the pain. However, to focus upon it arouses deep pain (e.g., "I can say it now but to feel it hurts way too much"). The presented information which she finds most valuable is that which she can identify with: she notices that her personal experiences are not always similar to those reported in the literature (e.g., "I have some trouble buying some of the information by Lenore Walker .... I've experienced it (i.e. cycle of violence) a lot more unpredictably"). She recognizes that the other women and she are at different stages in their marital relationship: some find it easier to separate than others.

Michele is aware of feeling less shame and having a greater sense of 'self'. Her increased self-confidence allows her to make critical comments regarding the group counselling (i.e. lack of regular attendance by some of the women; group facilitators not informing the group of reasons for absence; insensitive presentation by a male guest speaker). Her feelings of personal power and confidence are inspired through seeing the other women attain their goals. She notices that the behavior of the other women is not based on avoiding the judgement of others but on pleasing themselves. She admires a woman who returned to spend time with her husband to acquire the furniture because this woman was not concerned whether others thought she was absurd to be back with her husband. During our validation session, Michele related that she felt others would negatively judge her for wanting to spend time with her husband.

One excerpt repeated twice by Michele reflects that she is more open about her vulnerabilities and dependencies in the coffee room than she is in the group (e.g., "It's more in the coffee room that the reality of us comes out"). She also repeated a statement which reveals her impression that her feelings, during her childhood, that child abuse is wrong, have been validated (e.g., "Every once in a while people would do things that I could hold on to"). Her group experience focuses on the themes of increased self-awareness, expanded awareness, and perception of "openness". These themes are reflected in the following synthesis of her experience.

Overall Synthesis of Michele's Process

Michele experiences a shift from negatively judging herself and the other women in the group to a more positive valuation of herself and of women in general. This leads to a greater identification with the other women. While personal sharing increases in the group over time, she finds that she can be more open about her vulnerabilities and dependencies in the coffee room where the focus is not on developing independence. She gains a greater awareness of the prevalence of violence against women and children and attempts to understand why her father was abusive of her. She contemplates the meaning of love and resolves that love is not part of abusive relationships. She learns to be more discerning in judging male personalities. She also gains a greater understanding of the influence that her traditional upbringing, with its emphasis upon sex-role stereotypes, had upon her personality development (i.e. lack of self-identity, lack of self-nurturance, lack of self-direction).

Leigh

Personal Information

Leigh is 36 years old and plans to attend a social work program in the fall. She and a younger sister were raised by foster parents. She describes her foster father as a quiet man and her foster mother as emotionally abusive at times.

Leigh cares for her three children between the ages of 3 and 8 and a teenage nephew. She was divorced two years ago from her husband after 11 years of marriage and is presently on social assistance. Her husband's violence, which consisted of punching and kicking her and threatening her with knives and guns, began in their sixth year of marriage when she was pregnant with their first child. His physical assaults were erratic initially and became more frequent and severe. She related that he also put down her abilities as a homemaker and mother, was very jealous, and visited prostitutes. She charged him with assault which stopped his physical violence for two years. However, when she "could see it coming again" she left permanently.

Her husband and she have seen numerous counsellors (i.e. ministers, psychiatrists, marriage therapists) whose focus was on "how to be a better wife". She went to hospital emergency on two occasions, once with a broken nose.

Leigh began her first group two years ago which was a short-term 10 week group at Forensic Assessment and Community Services in Edmonton. From there, she participated in 20 sessions of group counselling at the YWCA. She decided to become a co-facilitator and attended a training course and is presently co-leading her third group. The extracted excerpts from the transcribed interview with Leigh, and the analysis of each excerpt, are presented in Table 5. Following upon, and derived from Tables 5 and 6, is the paraphrase of Leigh's group experience. Table 6 presents a clustering of the first level abstractions from Table 5, representing the same theme, into a generalized description of that particular theme. The numbers shown under each theme in Table 6 indicate the excerpts taken from Table 5.

Table 5
Thematic Abstraction of Leigh's Group Experience

	Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Two Levels of Abstraction 1. Paraphrases	 2. Themes
1.	At first I told her (i.e. counsellor) I wouldn't come and then the more I thought about what the whole thing was about I wanted to go then but for me not for our relationship.	Initial decision not to attend changes through recognizing her need to focus on herself not her marital relationship.	Recognition of self-direction.
2.	So when I went to the first stage group I know from talking to the other women that they found me quite threatening because my attitude was why are you being so stupid. All you have to do is leave him. Be like me, do like me, but then I started seeing things in myself that I didn't like. I realized that I didn't know what my opinions were on anything because I had to adjust my opinions to suit my husband so there wasn't any fighting.	Increased awareness of her judgement of others through their feedback; initially thought that change merely involves leaving an abusive marriage; realizes what she needs to change in herself; recognizes lack of freedom in her marriage to express herself.	Recognition of need for self-direction rather than other-direction.
3.	I did recognize that I was not responsible for the violence but that I was responsible for being there that that was a choice that I made to stay.	Awareness of self-responsibility to make personal changes; not responsible for husband's behavior.	Recognition of self-direction.
4.	We learned how to be good to ourselves and I started spending a little time with myself and I felt selfish.	Realizes lack of self-care; learns how to care for herself; begins to focus on self; recognizes feelings of selfishness.	Realization of lack of self-nurturance.
5.	But the progress then from letting go of what happened in the past and trying to do something about me now I just felt like it all clicked. The light bulb went on and I grabbed on and just ran and grew by leaps and bounds in those next ten weeks.	Awareness of tremendous self-growth through letting go of the past and focusing on self in the 'present'.	Recognition of self-direction.
6.	I could just do something different from what I had always done before (i.e. in relationship to husband). That was a major learning experience for me.	Awareness of increased control over her life through learning new behaviors in relating to her husband.	Recognition of self-direction.
7.	I put up with so much garbage yet I could be intolerant of somebody else because they were putting up with stuff they shouldn't. It's something I have to be very conscious of because I become very impatient and want to just drag everybody along with me.	Awareness of needing to be self-aware of her intolerance and impatience to avoid imposing her goals on others.	Increased self-awareness.

8.	I found that women aren't so shallow. There is so much feeling that women are willing to give on to another if you just give them the opportunity.	Change in view of women from negative to positive.	Heightened valuation of women.
9.	For a long time I didn't want to be touched by anyone and now I love to hug women. The feeling is not like a man woman feeling. It's a real belonging and a real caring, and a real relating like they know what I am feeling because they feel it.	Move from avoiding to enjoying physical expression of affection and support; realizes differences between men and women; greater closeness with women.	Heightened valuation of women.
10.	I had to go right back to how do I feel about religion, parenting, politics, poverty, just general things that everybody has an opinion on but I didn't. And now I find that because I know what my opinions are I don't hesitate to voice them.	Realizes her lack of opinion on general issues; enhanced recognition of her opinions; verbally expresses them.	Increased self-awareness and self-expression.
11.	It feels so good to know that I can be stubborn because I know how I really feel about a topic and I don't have to hedge around and avoid conversations or arguments.	Confidence increases through self-awareness; move from avoiding self-expression to engaging in discussion.	Enhancement of personal power.
12.	I'm able to say no where I never could before.	Ability to make decisions on self-choice.	Enhancement of personal power.
13.	The first thing I learned was how strong a person I am that I endured all those years of that (i.e. husband's abuse). That was the first thing I patted myself on the back for. Now I can give myself positive strokes over lots of things.	First new learning is of self; positive view of self through recognizing her strength; initiates self-compliments.	Enhancement of self-acceptance.
14.	I hinged on how everybody else saw me and now I know that I have good points and I have my faults but I accept myself regardless.	Recognizes that her view of herself was determined by the views others had of her; move to self-evaluation and self-acceptance.	Enhancement of self-acceptance.
15.	Now I can put names to what I am, the qualities that I have.	Learns new language to describe herself; enhances self-esteem.	Enhancement of personal power.
16.	I wouldn't voice how I felt to anybody. I stuffed my anger. Now I can say I'm angry.	Awareness of self-change; move from disregarding herself to expressing her anger.	Enhancement of personal power and emotional self-expression.
17.	I don't want surface friendships anymore. I want to share what I'm feeling and I want to know what they're feeling. I've tried with all of my friends and some of them will do that and those that won't I just don't put that label friendship to them anymore.	Re-evaluates her friendships; desires intimacy.	Evaluating relationships.
18.	I have been emotionally intimate with him (i.e. new boyfriend) but I don't feel like he has been with me and I'm aware that that is not okay that if it doesn't change then there's no point in pursuing that relationship.	Realizes her need for mutual intimate relating with men; basis for evaluating relationships.	Evaluating relationships.

19.	I've had to do it as I feel about everything not how somebody else might perceive it or want from me only what I want and that is really hard to do but I did that and I'm doing okay. I know I can do it on my own.	Awareness of difficult process of self-change; move from being directed by others to self-direction; successful experience enhances self-confidence.	Recognition of self-direction.
20.	I only have to stay in a relationship until I don't want it anymore where my values before group were marriage is until death do us part.	Change in view on marriage; move from traditional to self-chosen view.	Change in world-view.
21.	And even my values as far as raising the kids have changed. I don't have to control them. There is such a fine line between instilling what's right and wrong and controlling them.	Awareness of different perception of parental responsibility; not to control but to teach.	Change in world-view.
22.	I can be and do anything I want and I try to instill that in my kids.	Increased awareness of options and personal choice; teaches new learning to her children.	Recognition of self-direction.
23.	I never used to be able to say how I was feeling. I couldn't even have named all of the emotions that everybody is supposed to feel. I was just so flat.	Realizes lack of expression of her feelings and lack of learning about emotions.	Increased self-awareness.
24.	It was wonderful to know that I felt embarrassed and its been like that with every new feeling like no matter how horrible the feeling is. It's the wonderful feeling that I get from being aware that I know what I am feeling.	Increased ability to name her emotions, whether pleasurable or painful, enhances self-esteem.	Enhancement of personal power and emotional expression.
25.	It (i.e. grieving process) wasn't as difficult as it is for a lot of the women I see and perhaps that is why the process is slower for them.	Recognizes that the grieving process for her was shorter than it is for the other women; implies her acceptance of her marital break-up.	Comparing self to others.
26.	I am fine just the way that I am. I'm just not ashamed of my body anymore. I no longer feel I have to run out and have my breasts done which is such a relief to feel okay about myself. And I do enjoy sex and I really thought I never would.	Accepts physical appearance; relieves pressure to alter physical features; enhances sexual expression.	Enhanced self-acceptance.
27.	I could go from thinking that I couldn't type to I can do well at university and what was so remarkable for me was that I did do well. I still sit in awe that I did do well.	Awareness of significant growth in self-confidence; intellectual ability confirmed through successful experience; self-amazement.	Enhancement of personal power.
28.	I had to learn that it was okay to take and that's very intimate to be able to take.	Increased comfortableness with receiving support and affection from others; recognizes the enhancement of mutual intimacy.	Increased self-awareness and realization of reciprocity of social relations.

29.	I see where I could have empowered myself rather than help them to empower themselves (i.e. as a co-leader).	Recognizes that the role of a counsellor involves helping others to feel their personal power and not to feel self-power at their expense.	Evaluating relationships.
30.	I first started thinking that this (i.e. co-leading women's groups) is what I wanted to do for a job because I thought that most people who get help feel that way and they rush off to school and then they are going to help everybody else so I waited for it to pass but it hasn't passed.	Gains realization of her genuine desire to serve as a counsellor.	Increased self-awareness.
31.	We don't even acknowledge the need for other women. Like that is a show of weakness to need support for yourself.	Realizes that women, including self, do not admit to needing the support of other women; viewed as a personal weakness.	Increased self-awareness.
32.	I never felt intimidated or put down in any way.	Perceives supportive atmosphere; absence of derogation of self by others.	Perception of supportive atmosphere.
33.	Some of the other women didn't seem to be aware that it was their responsibility to protect their kids and I get angry. I had to acknowledge that I was being judgemental and then I had to look at me again which I found hard.	Sees that other women have not protected their children; arouses her anger at them; recognizes her judgement of them; examines her own feelings; process experienced as complicated.	Increased self-awareness.
34.	When somebody cried I cried too because I could feel their hurting. It didn't matter if it was a woman I liked or didn't like but I did come to terms with it in that I don't have to like everybody.	Emotionally expresses empathy for others; not based on her personal feelings towards others; realizes that it is okay to dislike others.	Increased self-awareness; acceptance of self and others.
35.	I'm sure that there were women in there that didn't like me. One of them was the gal that her and I have become such good friends. She said she used to dread coming because she knew what I was going to say which in turn was back to her because she had to look at herself then too.	Realizes that she is not liked by everyone; recognizes that friendships can evolve regardless of initial feelings of dislike; process involves self-evaluation.	Evaluating relationships.
36.	Usually I went to stay with a friend until I could get an apartment and I would go right out on my own which I see now was a grave error because I was alone and there was no support.	Recognizes an absence of support during previous times of leaving her marriage; realizes that she returned because of lack of support and feelings of aloneness.	Increased self-awareness.
37.	I view myself as basically liberated but where I think the mistake is made in a lot of therapy is that if I want to be at home looking after the kids then that's where I should be, that I don't have to be out there being a career woman in order to be classified as liberated.	Awareness that "being liberated" involves personal choice of roles; not based on views of others; experienced false judgement by a therapist because of her decision to choose traditional role.	Recognition of self-direction.

Table 6
Higher Order Thematic Descriptions of Leigh's Group Experience

	Thematic Clusters	Generalized Descriptions
1.	Recognition of Self-Direction (Excerpt Nos. from Table 5 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 19, 22, 37)	Change in focus from her relationship to herself fosters desire to attend counselling; initially sees leaving her marriage as being sufficient change; judges others for staying which creates distance between self and others; begins to become aware of her limitations; realizes that her husband's domination has stifled her growth; recognizes significant self-growth through letting go of her marriage and focusing on herself in the 'present'; awareness that making changes in herself is her responsibility; recognizes that she is not responsible for her husband's behavior; begins to feel increased control over her life through learning new behaviors in relating to her husband; moves from being directed by others to self-direction; recognizes that the process has been difficult for her; successful experiences of self-choice enhances self-confidence in her ability to be in charge of her life; recognizes options open to her and freedom to choose; awareness that "being liberated" means her personal choice whether she chooses a traditional or non-traditional role for women; teaches her new understanding of self-direction to her children.
2.	Realization of Lack of Self-Nurturance (4)	Realizes that she has not taken care of herself; learns how to nurture herself; begins to take time to care for herself; recognizes feelings of selfishness which diminish over time.
3.	Increased Self-Awareness (7, 10, 23, 28, 30, 31, 33, 34, 36)	Recognizes that her feelings of intolerance, impatience, and anger lead her to negatively judge the other women; moves from judging the others to self-evaluation; realizes the importance of not imposing her goals on others; awareness of her significant growth in being able to recognize and express her opinions and feelings; realizes her past difficulty in asking for help from other women because she saw it as a sign of weakness; realizes that she returned to her marital relationship in the past because of a lack of support; is now more able to accept support and affection; sees that receiving support enhances mutual intimacy; expresses empathy for the pain of others regardless of her personal feelings towards them as is able to identify with their pain; realizes that it is okay not to like everybody; gains realization of her occupational goal (i.e. to become a professional counsellor).
4.	Heightened Valuation of Women (8, 9)	Change in view of women from negative (i.e. superficial) to positive (i.e. emotionally expressive and caring); moves from avoiding any physical contact to enjoying physical expression of affection and support; feels closer to women than to men.
5.	Enhancement of Personal Power (11, 12, 15, 16, 24, 27)	Gaining awareness of her thoughts and feelings enhances her confidence to express herself and to engage in discussion; significant change from disregarding herself to expressing her anger; increased ability to name numerous feelings, regardless of their nature, fosters self-esteem; heightened confidence in her intellectual ability which is confirmed through successful experience at university; feelings of self-amazement at her discovered capabilities.

6.	Enhancement of Self-Acceptance (13, 14, 26)	Begins to cultivate a positive view of herself by recognizing her strength; initiates self-compliments; her view of herself initially determined by the views others had of her; moves to self-evaluation; now able to accept her physical appearance - no longer feels the need to alter her physical features; recognizes that her desire for sexual expression is enhanced through accepting her physical self.
7.	Evaluating Relationships (17, 18, 29, 35)	Re-evaluates her existing friendships based on the degree of intimacy; recognizes her need for emotional relating with both men and women; establishes new definition of friendship which involves mutual intimate sharing; feels free to leave relationships (i.e. with male lovers) which are not meeting her needs; recognizes that close friendships can evolve from initial feelings of dislike if one is willing and able to look at herself; realizes that the role of the counsellor is to empower others and not to feel self-power at their expense.
8.	Change in World-view (20, 21)	Traditional values on marriage (i.e. until death do us part) replaced with more liberal values (i.e. freedom to leave if unsatisfying); realization of different perception of parental responsibility - not to control but to teach children.
9.	Comparing Self to Others (25)	Recognizes that the grieving process was shorter for her than it is for the other women; implies her acceptance of her marital break-up.
10.	Perception of Supportive Atmosphere (32)	Perceives the other women as supportive; has not experienced derogation in the group.

Paraphrase of Leigh's Group Experience

Leigh initially feels that she does not need group counselling because she had left her husband and that was all she needed to do to help herself. However, she comes to realize her need for counselling because of her lack of self-awareness and her uncertainty about her future (e.g., "I didn't know what my opinions were on anything because I had to adjust my opinions to suit my husband so there wasn't any fighting .... I was out there on social assistance with my kids and what do I do from there").

Leigh relates that she "had to go right back to how do I feel about religion, parenting, politics, poverty, just general things that everybody has an opinion on but I didn't". She learns what her views are which increases her confidence to express herself (e.g., "Now I find that because I know what my opinions are I don't hesitate to voice them"). Knowing her beliefs also enhances her self-esteem and allows her to be persistent (e.g., "It feels so good to know that I can be stubborn because I know how I really feel about a topic and I don't have to hedge around and avoid conversations or arguments"). Her confidence in her intellectual ability is heightened which encourages her to take a university course. She does well which leaves her feeling amazed at her discovered capabilities (e.g., "I still sit in awe that I did do well").

She recognizes that she used to be "so flat", but now she is able to express her emotions. She moves from disregarding her feelings to being able to express her anger (e.g., "I wouldn't voice how I felt to anybody. I stuffed my anger. Now I can say I'm angry"). Her increased ability to name her feelings enhances her self-esteem, regardless of the particular nature of an emotion (e.g., "its been like that with every new feeling like no matter how horrible the feeling is. It's the wonderful feeling that I get from being aware that I know what I am feeling").

Learning how to relate emotionally with the other women in the group arouses her desire for such relationships. She generalizes her new behavior to relationships outside of the group setting which leads her to re-evaluate her friendships (e.g., "I want to share what I'm feeling and I want to know what they're feeling. I've tried with all of my friends and some of them will do that and those that won't I just don't put that label friendship to them anymore"). She also recognizes her need for mutual intimate sharing with men. Reciprocal intimate sharing becomes an expectation of a relationship with a male lover. She contemplates terminating a relationship with a new boyfriend because of his lack of intimate sharing. She notices her change in relationship values (e.g., "I only have to stay in a relationship until I don't want it anymore where my values before group were marriage is until death do us part").

Leigh initially thinks that she "just needed to be as confident as I was when I was nineteen years old and met my husband" but realizes that her self-esteem was low prior to her marriage. She begins to cultivate a positive view of herself by recognizing her strength which initiates self-compliments (e.g., "The first thing I learned was how strong a person I am .... Now I can give myself positive strokes over lots of things"). The new words she learns to describe her personality also enhance her self-esteem (e.g., "Now I can put names to what I am, the qualities that I have"). She comes to accept herself as she is without needing the approval of others (e.g., "I hinged on how everybody else saw me and now I know that I have good points and I have my faults but I accept myself regardless"). She also notices her move from wanting to alter her physical features to appreciating her body (e.g., "I no longer feel I have to run out and have my breasts done which is such a relief to feel okay about myself"). Her desire for sexual expression is enhanced through accepting her physical self. She realizes that she has not taken care of her physical and emotional well-being and begins to do that (e.g., "We learned how to be good to ourselves .... I started taking the time to have a nice long soak in the bathtub"). Initially she feels selfish about taking time for herself but informed me during our validation session that she no longer feels selfish in caring for herself.

Leigh experiences a significant positive shift in her view of women through seeing their caring qualities (e.g., "I found that women aren't so shallow. There is so much feeling that women are willing to give one to another if you just give them the opportunity"). She also moves from avoiding physical expression of affection and support to feeling a stronger closeness with women than with men (e.g., "The feeling is not like a man-woman feeling. It's a real belonging and a real caring and a real relating like they know what I am feeling because they feel it"). She realizes that she initially did not admit to needing the support of other women because she saw it as a sign of personal weakness. She notices this to be true for many women (e.g., "We don't even acknowledge the need for other women. Like that is a show of weakness to need support for yourself"). She also notices that she "never felt intimidated or put down in any way" by the other women in the group. She realizes that she had returned to her husband several times after leaving him because of a lack of emotional support (e.g., "I would go right out on my own which I see now was a grave error because I was alone and there was no support"). She comes to see that accepting support enhances intimate sharing (e.g., "I had to learn that it was okay to take and that's very intimate to be able to take").

She is aware that she does not like all of the women she has met in the groups and reconciles herself to that.

However, she feels empathy for all of the women regardless of her personal feelings towards them (e.g., "When somebody cried I cried too because I could feel their hurting. It didn't matter if it was a woman I liked or didn't like").

She realizes that she is not liked by everybody either. She recalls not being liked by one woman; but they have since become good friends because the woman realized that what she disliked in Leigh was also a trait she possessed. Leigh relates that she too analyzes herself whenever she is experiencing feelings of anger, intolerance, or impatience towards the other women (e.g., "I had to acknowledge that I was being judgmental and then I had to look at me again"). During our validation session, Leigh related that she was co-leading her third group and that her feelings of impatience have lessened because she now understands that the rate of healing and self-growth varies among the women. She notices that the grieving process was perhaps shorter for her than it is for the other women because she had given up on trying to reconcile her marriage. She states that she began to grow significantly by letting go of the past and focusing on herself in the present: "But the progress then from letting go of what happened in the past and trying to do something about me now .... I grabbed on and just ran and grew by leaps and bounds". She comes to understand that the role of the group facilitator is not to impose her goals on others and not to feel self-power at the expense of the others (e.g., "I see where I could have empowered myself rather than help them to empower themselves").

Leigh understands that she was not responsible for her husband's violence but that: "I was responsible for being there, that that was a choice that I made to stay". Recognizing her husband's controlling behavior helps her to maintain her boundaries: she does not give in to his wishes to reconcile. She realizes that the process in moving from pleasing others to acting according to her needs and desires has been difficult for her. However, her successful experience of being a single parent enhances her confidence in her ability to direct her own life (e.g., "I've had to do it as I feel about everything, not how somebody else might perceive it or want from me, only what I want and that is really hard to do but I did that and I'm doing okay").

She recognizes the options open to her and her freedom to choose. She is aware that "being liberated" means her personal choice whether she chooses a traditional or non-traditional role for women. She decides to pursue a career in professional counselling. The new confidence and awareness she gains is communicated to her children (e.g., "I can be and do anything I want and I try to instill that in my kids").

An excerpt which Leigh repeated several times reflects her positive shift in her perception of women (e.g., "Now I love women"). Her experience focuses on the themes of increased self-awareness, followed by recognition of self-direction and enhancement of personal power. These themes are reflected in the following synthesis of her experience.

Overall Synthesis of Leigh's Process

Leigh experiences a significant move from pleasing others to feeling empowered in taking responsibility for her own life. She discovers her intellectual abilities and decides to pursue a professional counselling career. She also moves from a negative view of women to a heightened valuation of women. Her own self-esteem is enhanced through becoming aware of and expressing her feelings and opinions. She comes to accept her physical appearance. She learns how to relate emotionally and expects the same from her relationships outside of the group. She recognizes the importance of the support she receives from the other women in facilitating her self-growth. Her new confidence and heightened awareness is shared with her children.

Pamela

Personal Information

Pamela is a 25 year old parent of two pre-school children. She is currently completing her high school diploma with future plans of attending NAIT. She is the eldest of three female children. Her parents have been divorced for the past fourteen years.

Pamela separated nine months ago from her husband of 10 years. Her husband's physical assults, which began the third year of their relationship, included slapping, pushing, and kicking her. He was also verbally abusive of her and criticized her abilities as a mother and homemaker. She related that she decided to leave him when he began physically abusing their son.

A friend told her about the group at Edmonton Social Services which she began attending in November 1986. She had seen a social worker for several sessions earlier that fall after inquiring about social assistance. However, she stated that individual counselling was not as helpful because she felt like she was the only one in her situation.

The extracted excerpts from the transcribed interview with Pamela, and the analysis of each excerpt, are presented in Table 7. Following upon, and derived from Tables 7 and 8, is the paraphrase of Pamela's group experience. Table 8 presents a clustering of the first level abstractions from Table 7, representing the same theme, into a generalized description of that particular theme. The numbers shown under each theme in Table 8 indicate the excerpts taken from Table 7.

Table 7
Thematic Abstraction of Pamela's Group Experience

	Excerpts from Transcribed Interview	Two Levels of Abstraction 1. Paraphrases	2. Themes
1.	It was really good for me to be able to see that I wasn't the only one. There were lots of other normal people who were going through this.	Realization of not being alone; implies prior image of "battered women" as not being normal.	Lessening of social isolation.
2.	I made some friendships out of the group which was really nice.	Appreciation of opportunity to make new friends.	Lessening of social isolation.
3.	I was never able to talk about things that were bothering me. If something bothered me, the more it bothered me, the less I talked about it and it gave me an opportunity to learn how to talk about the problems that I was having.	Recognizes that she kept her problems to herself, suggests self-disclosure involves learning how to.	Learning new communication skills.
4.	It wasn't like you were just going to talk to someone; you had a goal to look forward to.	Suggests that problem resolution does not merely involve discussion but the working towards a goal.	Recognition of self-direction.
5.	All of the sayings were a big help too like "you're not alone"; "it's okay to let go".	Verbal affirmations provide reassurance.	Enhancement of personal power.
6.	It made me realize that my husband felt like he was losing control of me.	Gains explanation of husband's abusive behavior.	Enhancement of personal power.
7.	Up until the time that I started going to the group I felt I made him beat me up.	Awareness of self-blame prior to group involvement.	Increased self-awareness.
8.	I started into another relationship shortly after (i.e. leaving marriage) where the same patterns were repeating themselves. I thought that it was something that I was doing that I just brought out the worst in everybody (i.e. male partners) and the group made me realize that I am okay.	Recognizes abusive behavior of new boyfriend; blames self; others help to lessen self-blame; self-acceptance is fostered.	Heightened self-esteem.
9.	It gave me the insight to see what was going on. If I wasn't in the counselling I would have been into the second relationship really deep and getting beaten up.	Gains awareness of the beginnings of an abusive relationship; enables early decision to terminate the relationship.	Enhancement of personal power.
10.	It has really changed the way that I am with my kids. I was always yelling. It taught me to slow down, see what is happening; to act instead of to react.	Recognizes positive change in her parenting skills; reflects on matters before implementing decisions.	Increased self-awareness.
11.	When I first started the counselling I was so confused. It made the spinning slow down for me; to take a step back and take a different view.	Awareness of the lessening of emotional confusion; intellectual reflection; gains new understanding of victimization process.	Expanded awareness.

12.	They (i.e. the other women) found peace and happiness. I can find peace and happiness too.	Notices positive changes in the lives of others; instills self-confidence and hope.	Enhancement of personal power.
13.	Up until the time I went into the counselling I felt like a victim. I had no control over my life. Everyone else had control over me. Now I feel like I have control.	Prior feelings of helplessness; moves from being directed by others to independence; no longer a "pleaser".	Recognition of self-direction.
14.	I think that because of coming from a broken home (i.e. family of origin) I didn't know how to have a normal relationship.	Realizes absence of role model; implies new learning in establishing and maintaining a healthy couple relationship.	Evaluating relationships.
15.	I can't just pick out a point here and a point there about how it has changed my life because it has done so many wonderful things for me and I understood before I went there that it wasn't just going to happen. I had to work at it. I just didn't sit there. I was really involved and I just wouldn't leave what I learnt there.	Awareness of many personal changes; prior recognition of self-responsibility; self-change involves active participation; applies new learning in her everyday living.	Recognition of self-direction.
16.	It would have mattered who ran it (i.e. the group) and how they ran it but the girls that were involved in it were like me. They realized that some changes had to be made.	Recognizes that group facilitators require special qualities and skills; desire for change present in self and others.	Recognition of self-direction.
17.	They (i.e. counsellors) stressed phoning each other. I started to realize that I could use other people to pick me up rather than to drag other people down.	Encouragement of mutual support; awareness of increased self-confidence through support from others; suggests prior notion of being a burden to others.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.
18.	I realized that my life had become unmanageable but I didn't know what to do to change it. The group just seemed to give me some direction.	Initial experience of being "stuck" in her desire for change; self-change fostered by guidance from others.	Recognition of self-direction.
19.	It made me realize that I can be a friend and that someone can be my friend too.	Recognizes her ability to form friendships; implies prior lack of friendships.	Lessening of social isolation.
20.	It taught me how to talk about my feelings, how I feel about things. It has made me aware of my feelings.	Increased awareness of feelings and values; expression of feelings involves learning how to.	Increased self-awareness.
21.	I never expected nine months ago that I could change this much. I mean going from someone who the only way I thought I had to go was alcohol or drugs to I have so much to live for, so much to look forward to. I get up every morning and I feel good.	Awareness of her significant growth, heightened self-esteem; optimistic outlook.	Heightened self-esteem.
22.	I didn't realize that it (i.e. happiness) was something that you had to strive for.	Recognizes that "happiness" does not just happen; involves self-responsibility.	Recognition of self-direction.

23.	I miss Wednesday afternoons now (i.e. the group). I wish I was still able to attend but in the summer I will be able to again.	Realizes her need for group involvement; plans to attend again.	Realization of need for support.
24.	I know how much help I've been to other people in the group.	Realizes her ability to assist others; enjoys helping others; enhances self-esteem.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.
25.	I did a little bit of one on one too (i.e. individual counselling) but I felt like I was all by myself with two little kids. The group made me realize that there are lots of other people out there like me where before I always thought that I was alone and that there was no one worse off than me.	Experienced feelings of isolation in individual counselling; isolation lessens through group involvement; recognizes that others have more serious problems; self-esteem enhanced.	Lessening of social isolation.
26.	One thing I still carry around with me every day is you can use people but you don't have to abuse them. I can use our friendship but I don't have to abuse it. It (i.e. this insight) just came to me one day.	Sudden insight about friendship remains in her everyday consciousness; provides new meaning.	Evaluating relationships.
27.	I would be a nervous wreck but by the time the two hours had gone by I was calm. I was able to think about what was going on.	Initial emotional confusion dissipates through new learning about the victimization process.	Expanded awareness.
28.	It made me realize that I have needs that have to be met and responsibilities; that I have to meet other people's needs too.	Recognizes the mutual exchange of meeting needs; involves responsibility.	Realization of self-other reciprocity.
29.	I was so surprised at the cross-section. I realized that it had nothing to do with the way we looked or the way we acted or the job we had or the money we had; it was our feelings.	Realizes the diverse characteristics of "battered women"; suggests prior misconception of why women are battered; recognizes common characteristic to be similar feelings.	Expanded awareness.
30.	I used their strength to build myself up; like I used it to change my life and my whole outlook on life.	Self-esteem and self-confidence are inspired through seeing the strength of others; significant personal changes transpire.	Enhancement of personal power.
31.	When I was with my husband I wasn't allowed to wear make-up or to buy new clothes because he thought I would be chasing other men. If I want to put on make-up I'm doing it to feel good, to make myself feel better.	Moves from her husband's control of her physical appearance to self-care to please herself.	Recognition of self-direction.
32.	It makes me sad that it had to be my kids who brought me out of there (i.e. abusive marriage). My self-esteem was so low that it didn't matter what happened to me.	Expresses sadness for not caring enough about herself; decided to leave to protect her children; realizes that her low self-esteem inhibited her protection of herself.	Increased self-awareness of her lack of self-compassion.
33.	I'm using the group to help me get some strength around my husband.	Support from others enables self-assertion with her husband.	Enhancement of personal power.

34.	It taught me how to relate, so from the people in the group, I expanded that to my family, to my friends, to my acquaintances.	New communication skills are applied in everyday relationships.	Learning new communication skills.
35.	And taking what people are giving (i.e. support and compliments) and using that and not putting it off in a corner somewhere but I'm using that in my everyday life.	Enhanced ability to receive support; fosters self-confidence.	Realization of need for support.

Table 8
Higher Order Thematic Descriptions of Pamela's Group Experience

	Thematic Clusters	Generalized Descriptions
1.	Lessening of Social Isolation (Excerpt Nos. from Table 7: 1, 2, 19, 25)	Experienced feelings of being alone when in individual counselling; through group involvement realizes that she is not alone; recognizes that others have more serious problems; realizes that "battered women" are not abnormal; recognizes her ability to form friendships; appreciates new friendships.
2.	Learning New Communication Skills (3, 34)	Moves from keeping her problems to herself to learning how to share her problems with others; applies new ways of relating to her everyday relationships.
3.	Recognition of Self-Direction (4, 13, 15, 16, 18, 22, 31)	Desires change (i.e. unhappy with life) but experiences being "stuck"; receives guidance from others; realizes that group facilitators require special qualities and skills; realizes that she is responsible for her own happiness; sees that others take responsibility for their lives too; recognizes her move from being directed by others to self-direction (i.e. from being a victim to taking control of her own life); also moves from her husband's control of her physical appearance to self-care to please herself; is actively involved in her own self-growth; takes her new awareness into her everyday living; realizes that self-change does not merely involve talking but the working towards a goal.
4.	Enhancement of Personal Power (5, 6, 9, 12, 30, 33)	Gains insight into the nature of abusive behavior; uses insight to evaluate relationship with new boyfriend; decides to terminate relationship because of his abusive behavior; support from others also enables her to be assertive with her husband; seeing the positive changes and strength of others fosters self-confidence and hope; significant personal changes transpire; verbal affirmations provide reassurance that she made the right decision to leave her marriage.
5.	Evaluating Relationships (14, 26)	Realizes absence of healthy role model in her family of origin; gains new understanding of a healthy couple relationship; experiences sudden insight into the meaning of friendship (i.e. for support) which becomes part of her everyday consciousness.
6.	Increased Self-Awareness (7, 10, 20, 32)	Realizes that she is not to blame for her husband's abusive behavior; recognizes that her low self-esteem prevented her from leaving her marriage; expresses sadness for not caring enough about herself; her decision to leave her marriage came out of her concern for her children and not also for herself; recognizes a positive change in her parenting skills (i.e. increased ability to take charge); increased awareness and expression of feelings and values.
7.	Heightened Self-Esteem (8, 21)	Supportive others help to lessen self-blame and foster self-acceptance; awareness of significant change in her self-esteem (i.e. moves from depression to a very optimistic outlook).

8.	Realization of Self-Other Reciprocity (17, 24, 28)	Moves from feeling like she is a burden to recognizing the mutual exchange of support; recognizes that meeting the needs of others involves responsibility; realizes her ability to assist others.
9.	Realization of Need for Support (23, 35)	Realizes her need for supportive relationships; plans to attend more group sessions; enhanced ability to receive and use support to bolster self-confidence.
10.	Expanded Awareness (11, 27, 29)	Realizes that women are not battered because of specific characteristics; awareness of diverse characteristics of women who are battered; recognizes shared characteristic to be similar feelings; increased understanding of victimization process lessens emotional confusion.

Paraphrase of Pamela's Group Experience

In joining the group, Pamela realizes that she is not alone: other women have also been assaulted by their husbands, have left their marriages, and are now single parents (e.g., "I felt like I was all by myself with two little kids. The group made me realize that there are lots of other people out there like me"). She also notices that some of the other women are more depressed than she is. This recognition reassures her of her well-being and helps to enhance her self-worth (e.g., "I'm not trying to sound better than anybody else but it was always kind of a neat feeling for me to know that there was someone else out there who their low, low, low, was lower than mine"). Her own depression lessens significantly after joining the group (e.g., "I mean going from someone who the only way I thought I had to go was alcohol or drugs to I have so much to live for .... I get up every morning and I feel good").

Her emotional confusion lessens through gaining a greater understanding of the victimization process (i.e. cycle of violence) (e.g., "When I first started the counselling I was so confused. It made the spinning slow down for me; to take a step back and take a different view"). She begins to explain her husband's abusive behavior as a way of controlling her. Before attending group she blamed herself for her husband's assaults but now recognizes that she is not responsible for his behavior.

The other women help her to realize that it was not something about her that was causing her husband to assault her (e.g., "I felt I made him beat me up .... the group made me realize that I am okay"). She notices the diverse characteristics amongst the women and recognizes the common characteristic of similar feelings (e.g., "I was so surprised at the cross-section. I realized that it had nothing to do with the way we looked or the way we acted or the job we had or the money we had; it was our feelings"). Her new understanding of abusive relationships helps her to terminate a relationship with a new boyfriend who was beginning to be abusive. She acquires a greater understanding of what constitutes a healthy couple relationship, attributing her earlier ignorance to the absence of a healthy role model during her childhood because her parents were divorced (e.g., "I think that because of coming from a broken home I didn't know how to have a normal relationship").

She realizes that her self-blame and low self-esteem prevented her from leaving the marriage. She expresses sadness that she did not care enough about herself; initially leaving her husband to protect her children and not herself. Self-worth is enhanced through the support received from the other women (e.g., "I used their strength to build myself up"). Her heightened self-esteem and increased self-awareness help her to move from other-directedness to self-direction (e.g., "Everyone else had control over me. Now I feel like I have control"). During our validation session she disclosed that previously she was always trying to please others but is now able to make decisions based on her desires. Her husband no longer controls her physical appearance; she modifies her appearance to please herself (e.g., "When I was with my husband I wasn't allowed to wear make-up .... If I want to put on make-up I'm doing it to feel good, to make myself feel better"). She realizes, even before she begins attending group, that happiness is within her control. However, she explains that: "The group just seemed to give me some direction". The special qualities and skills of the group facilitators are recognized (e.g., "It would have mattered who ran it and how they ran it"). Also, seeing that the other women have found "peace and happiness" fosters hope for herself. Using the verbal affirmations that she has learned reassures her that ~~she~~ is making the right decision in not returning to her husband (e.g., "All of the sayings were a big help too, like 'you're not alone'; 'it's okay to let go'").

Initially, Pamela feels like a burden to the other women but hearing the group facilitators encourage mutual support among the women, helps her to realize that: "I could use other people to pick me up rather than to drag other people down". The need for ongoing support from other women is recognized; she plans to attend group again when her classes finish. She is aware of the reciprocal nature of support (e.g., "It made me realize that I have needs that have to be met and responsibilities; that I have to meet other people's needs too"). During our validation session she related that she enjoys helping the other women because it helps her to feel good about herself. Learning to receive the support from the other women in the group helps her to accept the support she receives in her everyday living (e.g., "And taking what people are giving and using that and not putting it off in a corner somewhere"). She also generalizes her new communication skills to her relationships outside of the group and to her children in particular (e.g., "I was always yelling. It taught me to slow down, see what is happening; to act instead of to react").

Pamela recognizes her ability to form friendships and appreciates the opportunity to make new friends. She told me during our validation session that she really values her new friends because when she was with her husband she was not allowed to have her own friends. She expresses sudden insight about friendship which remains in her everyday consciousness: "One thing I still carry around with me every day is you can use people but you don't have to abuse them. It just came to me one day".

The extracted excerpts which were repeated more than once by Pamela reflect an increased openness in sharing her problems (e.g., "I was never able to talk about things that were bothering me") and a move from depression to heightened self-esteem (e.g., "it has done so many wonderful things for me"). Her group experience focuses on the themes of recognition of self-direction and enhancement of personal power which are reflected in the following synthesis of her experience.

Overall Synthesis of Pamela's Process

Pamela experiences a significant shift in her self-esteem: she moves from feeling depressed to feeling positive about herself and life in general. She learns that she is not responsbile for her husband's abusive behavior. She also moves from being a "pleaser" to taking responsibility for her own life. She feels good about her decision to be separated from her husband. New ways of emotional relating are learned (i.e. sharing feelings and personal problems) which she generalizes to relationships outside of the group. She uses her new communication skills in relating with her children. Her new understanding of a healthy couple relationship serves as a guide to evaluate relationships with male partners. She learns to receive the support of the other women in the group and enjoys helping them in return. Understanding the meaning of friendship (i.e. mutual support) and valuing the friendships she makes in the group is particularly important because she lacked friends when she was with her husband.

Shared Experience

The individual experiences reflect twenty-one themes which are defined in Table 9. The themes appear in Table 9 in the order in which they were formulated from the data analysis. The themes mentioned by all of the women include increased self-awareness, enhancement of personal power, and heightened evaluation of relationships. Although not all of the themes are mentioned by each participant, all but two (Nos. 11 and 13 in Table 9), have been verified to be common to all of the participants. The theme of "realization of distance between self and other battered women" is not part of Pamela's experience. She related that having a stigmatized image of other battered women did not hinder her from joining or participating in the group because she was at a point of desperately wanting help no matter who the other women in the group might be. However, by joining the group she becomes "surprised at the cross-section" and realizes that being victimized "had nothing to do with the way we looked or the way we acted or the job we had or the money we had". The second theme common to three of the four women is the questioning of the degree of her responsibility, outside of the group setting, in helping the other women. Leigh related that this was not really an issue for her because she had decided that she wished to be available as much as she could.

The themes common to all of the participants are further clustered into a higher abstraction of themes, as shown in Table 10. The numbers in parenthesis in Table 10 indicate the number of the theme from Table 9. The common themes are listed in an order which appears to reflect the process of growth within each higher order theme of experience. These higher order themes are reflected in the following description of the group experience which is shared by all of the participants.

Table 9
Definitions of Themes

1. Recognition of self-direction: awareness of her responsibility in directing her life; moves from other-directedness to self-direction.
2. Realization of self-other reciprocity: awareness of her thoughts and feelings in relation to the other women in the group.
3. Perception of supportive atmosphere: the group members are viewed as being helpful and encouraging; freedom of self-expression is fostered.
4. Expanded awareness: new learning regarding socio-political system; women's issues; prevalence of violence; victimization process.
5. Comparing self to others: she compares her feelings and experiences to those of the other women in the group; recognition of similarities and differences amongst experiences.
6. Evaluating relationships: she examines and evaluates her relationships outside of the group.
7. Enhancement of personal power: a process of becoming empowered; development of self-confidence and assertiveness.
8. Change in world-view: change in values and beliefs; a shift to or confirmation of non-traditional values regarding sex-roles and marriage.
9. Increased self-awareness: gain in self-knowledge and understanding of her feelings, thoughts, and behaviors; and patterns of interpersonal relating.
10. Enhancement of self-acceptance: increased acceptance of her personality and physical appearance.
11. Realization of distance between self and other "battered women": having a stigmatized image of the other women prevents her from interacting with them.
12. Perception of "openness": her view of the degree of sincere disclosure of herself and of the other women.
13. Recognition of responsibility: questions the degree of her responsibility, outside of the group setting, to the other women.
14. Assessing men: she examines and evaluates the characteristics of men.
15. Heightened valuation of self and other women: she experiences increased appreciation of being a woman; and increased appreciation of other women.
16. Realization of lack of nurturance: increased awareness of not receiving adequate care or support as a child or as an adult; her teachings involved caring for and pleasing others not herself.
17. Realization of lack of self-nurturance: awareness of not taking adequate care of her emotional and physical well-being.
18. Lessening of social isolation: feelings of aloneness lessen; opportunity for emotional relating.
19. Learning new communication skills: attains new ways of relating (i.e. sharing feelings and personal experiences, expressing needs); generalized to other relationships outside of group.
20. Heightened self-esteem: increase in her positive feelings about herself.
21. Realization of need for support: recognizes her need for supportive relationships.

Table 10

Higher Abstraction of Clustered Common Themes

1.	Assessment of Relationship (Nos. from Table 9)	(2) Realization of self-other reciprocity. (12) Perception of "openness". (3) Perception of supportive atmosphere. (21) Realization of need for support. (18) Lessening of social isolation. (19) Learning new communication skills. (6) Evaluating relationships. (14) Assessing men.
2.	Awareness of Self-Responsibility	(7) Enhancement of personal power. (1) Recognition of self-direction.
3.	Expanded Consciousness	(9) Increased self-awareness. (5) Comparing self to others. (4) Expanded awareness. (8) Change in world-view.
4.	Increased Appreciation of Self and Other Women	(16) Realization of lack of nurturance. (17) Realization of lack of self-nurturance. (20) Heightened self-esteem. (10) Enhancement of self-acceptance. (15) Heightened valuation of self and other women.

Common Themes of the Group Experience

Initially the battered woman holds a stigmatized image of other battered women. She also does not feel good about herself; she feels ashamed. Her negative feelings about herself and other women may arouse reluctance to attend. At first she is an observer. Her first impression of the other women may or may not fit her stigmatized image of battered women. She comes to understand how and why she and the other women have been victimized by their husbands. She learns that she is not responsible for her husband's behavior and her shame lessens. She learns that wife assault is prevalent and is part of a socio-political system which devalues women. Her new understanding of marital violence helps to lessen her emotional confusion.

The battered woman compares her experiences to those of the other women and realizes the similarities and differences in their experiences. In realizing that her situation is not unique, her feelings of aloneness lessen. She finds the other women to be supportive and she begins to feel safe in the group as she does not have to fear ridicule and criticism. Sharing her feelings and thoughts becomes more comfortable. Her self-awareness is enhanced and as she discloses more of herself over time, the emotional distance between the other women and herself lessens. Personal sharing also increases when feelings of comfortableness and belongingness are enhanced. She may experience greater authenticity between the other women and herself when she is socializing with them rather than in the group because the focus is not upon self-development.

The battered woman comes to feel better about herself as a person and as a woman, accepting her personality and her physical appearance. She gains awareness that she has not taken adequate care of her physical and emotional health because of a traditional upbringing: she was taught to take care of others, not herself. The other women in the group express concern for her physical and emotional well-being which encourages her to spend time taking care of herself. She also comes to have a greater appreciation of women in general through seeing their caring qualities.

She feels greater personal power and begins to take charge of her own life; questioning the attitudes she holds and discovers those which have been imposed on her which she is now free to reject. She adopts values and ways of thinking which she believes in. Her new way of being is communicated to her children.

Realizing her need for supportive relationships, she learns new ways of emotional relating which she generalizes to her relationships outside of the group. She uses her new communication skills with her family and friends. She gains a greater awareness of the nature of healthy and supportive relationships which provides her with a guide to evaluate her relationships outside of the group, including relationships with other professional counsellors. She feels free to assess the characteristics of men and to terminate a relationship with a male partner if he appears to be abusive or is not meeting her emotional needs.

This preceeding description of shared experience reveals an interweaving of experiences reflecting a process of personal growth. The following section presents my reflection on the common group experience as derived from Table 10.

Reflection on the Shared Group Experience

The common experience reflects a process of education, healing, and empowerment which transpires through a supportive environment. It is a process of expanded awareness about self, other battered women, others outside of the group setting, relationships, and societal attitudes. The movement involves a spiraling out from self, to other, and to world. The image that comes to mind is that of a circular sea shell. The battered woman comes to understand her devaluation of self to be linked to the devaluation of women in the outside world. She moves back into herself and comes to a heightened appreciation of herself as a woman and of all women. Her self-acceptance is enhanced and she begins to take care of her physical and emotional well-being. As she feels good about herself, she opens up to others and to the world. She questions the attitudes in the world and decides for herself what she believes and what she wants to do with her life. The other women provide her with support and she provides support in return. She exists in relationship to others and to the world.

CHAPTER 5

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Further Reflection on the Women's Experiences

Further reflection upon the participants' experiences also reveals the inter-relationship between the three dimensions of existence as described by Keen (1978): (1) being a body (the _Umwelt_), (2) being with others (the _Mitwelt_), and (3) being a self in time (the _Eigenwelt_). Keen suggests that each dimension is affected by the other two as well as by cultural attitudes. Hugette relates a greater acceptance of her physical appearance by seeing that the other women in the group were not self-conscious about their appearance. She also realizes that her husband's criticism of her appearance affected how she felt about her body. Although Hugette does not talk about how her view of herself is affected by the patriarchal standards of beauty for women, many women do rate their physical appearance according to the model images presented in the media (Rogers, 1980).

The greatest effect upon "being with others" is that of the stigmatized image of battered women which hindered three of the women from joining the group. There is a common societal myth that battered women are a certain type of woman (i.e. unattractive, low intelligence, cold, deserving of abuse), which does affect our image of who the battered woman is until we learn differently. The myth blames women for their victimization which in turn keeps them silenced and prevents them from interacting with other women. All of the women in this study have experienced a significant positive shift in their view of battered women. They have all moved from hiding their victimization to sharing it with other women. The tremendous change in openness was most obvious with Pamela who, when asked to select a false name, said that it did not matter if people knew her real name because she now knows that she is okay and that the abuse is a problem of her husband's behavior.

In relation to "being a self in time", all of the women have also experienced a significant move towards greater self-esteem. They have all come to understand that their view of themselvs as women has been affected by societal attitudes which devalue women. The supportive atmosphere of the group helps the women to develop greater appreciation of themselves and of other women.

The women in this study have also moved towards a greater belief in their own competence. Bandura's notion of self-efficacy (cited in Monte, 1980) may be considered in understanding the process of attaining personal competence. Bandura describes the strength of an individual's belief in their power of mastery as an "efficacy expectation" which is influenced by four factors: (1) one's personal history and anticipation of future success or failures; (2) observation of the successes and failures of others; (3) verbal persuasion by others and; (4) the degree of one's emotional arousal (i.e. high anxiety or fear has a debilitating effect) (cited in Monte, 1980). The women in this study appear to be motivated towards greater personal competence through: encouragement by the other women in the group, observing the competence of the other women, discovering their own capabilities and potentialities, and recalling successful experiences from their past.

Yalom (1985) suggests that therapeutic change "is an enormously complex process and occurs through an intricate interplay of various guided human experiences", which he refers to as "therapeutic factors" (p. 3). This explanation is true of each woman's experience: an experience arises from another which facilitates or fosters another. A comparison of the themes of this study with the factors described by Yalom suggests the "commonness" of group experience regardless of the nature of the group. The common experiences between this study and those presented by Yalom include: opportunity for self-expression; comparison of experiences; feelings of hope through seeing the improvement of others; enjoyment of helping others; enhanced self-acceptance; acceptance by others and; taking responsibility for one's life. The latter three themes reflect the existential themes of isolation and freedom.

The amount of support given by family and friends to the women in this study varies. Hugette experienced rejection from the majority of her family and friends when she expressed the desire to leave her husband. Leigh stated that she had previously returned to her husband because she experienced loneliness and a lack of emotional support from her friends. Through her experience in the group, she realized the lack of personal sharing between her friends and herself. Pamela related that her family supported her in her decision to leave, however she did not have any friends to talk to because her husband did not allow her to have friends. Prior to joining the group, none of the women in this study had the opportunity to share their experiences with other physically and emotionally abused women. Through their emotional relating with the other women, their feelings of isolation and aloneness lessened. Yalom (1980) describes this type of isolation as "interpersonal" which refers to being isolated from other individuals.

All of the women also talked about the importance of discovering and expressing their thoughts and feelings. Yalom (1980) defines this type of isolation as "intrapersonal". He describes it as a "fragmentation of the self....[which]....results whenever one stifles one's own feelings or desires, accepts 'oughts' or 'shoulds' as one's own wishes, distrusts one's own judgement, or buries one's own potential" (p. 354). Collier (1982) states that it is the role of the therapist to help women uncover the personal power within themselves by helping them to validate their feelings, ideas, and dreams; especially those which are suppressed. Within the group encounter, this validation also comes from other women who have had similar experiences.

A third type of isolation, which Yalom (1980) defines as "existential isolation", refers to the realization of "a separation between the individual and the world" and which may be felt despite feelings of closeness with another (p. 355). This type of isolation is reflected by Hugette who states: "I'm not saying that they're going to do it for me but at least they can steer me into the right direction".

The existential theme of freedom represents the move towards taking responsibility for one's life situations, choices, and actions. The women in this study develop an understanding that they are not responsible for their husband's violent behavior but that they are responsible for ensuring their safety. For these women, that meant making the choice to leave or not to return to their husbands, expecially when it became clear to them that their husbands would not end their abusive and controlling behavior. The women also recognize a change in their behavior from pleasing others to acting on their own needs and desires. Pamela related that she has decided that she would like to end her marriage, despite her husband's wish to reconcile.

Hugette described how she had to face her fear of being alone when contemplating marital separation. Weingourt (1985) suggests that battered women need to confront their death anxiety which she discusses mostly in relation to fear of being alone. Experiencing the end of a relationship is a painful process. However, as Washbourn (1977) explains, the time of loss and failure can be a critical time for self-growth; but first there needs to be a healing and "a movement from despair and self-condemnation into a rebirth of hope in a new self" (p. 74). However, death anxiety may also be quite literal for many battered women. Michele expressed feelings of shock when she related that she could have been killed by her husband. Leigh did not fear her death but mentioned that she left her husband because she feared that she might kill him in self-defense.

The process of growth revealed by the participants' experiences reflects Maslow's (1968) pattern of self-actualization. He postulates that lower level needs have to be satisfied before higher level needs emerge. His hierarchy of needs moves from basic needs, to safety needs, to belongingness needs, to esteem needs, and then to the need for self-actualization. The women in this study consider the group to be a safe place and with time they feel like they belong. They come to experience greater self-esteem which facilitates their move from pleasing others to self-direction. Their heightened personal power helps them to do what is necessary to put an end to their vicitimization and to feel safer in their everyday living. So it appears that their process of growth is a move towards higher level needs through the meeting of lower level needs. In addition, these women have moved from not acknowledging their personal needs to taking them very seriously. Baker Miller (1976) explains that women are encouraged to look after the needs of men at the expense of their own.

Sturdivant (1980) cites Kasten who points out that even within humanistic theories women are "not expected to become 'self-actualizing' and labeled 'exceptional' or 'unusual' if they do" (p. 88). This assertion is probably not surprising if we consider the cultural context within which women develop. For example, women's safety needs would never be as fully met as they may be for men particularly because of the great amount of violence directed towards women in our society. Also, on a more general level, women may not feel as much belongingness in society as men, because of the devaluation of women.

A significant positive change for the women in this study is a move towards greater valuation of self not only as a person but more particularly as a woman. In feeling good about being a woman, their valuation of women in general is heightened. What these women come to value in themselves and other women are those "feminine" qualities (i.e. concern for the emotional needs of others, emotional openness, co-operation) which are often not considered to be of equal value to "masculine" qualities (i.e. self-reliance, controlled emotion, competitiveness). Baker Miller (1976) states that: "We have a long tradition of trying to dispense with, or at least to control or neutralize, emotionality, rather than valuing, embracing and cultivating its contributing strengths" (p. 38).

The women in this study also experience greater appreciation of their bodies and begin to take better care of their emotional and physical well-being without feeling selfish. Their journey actually represents the collective journey for all women because of the devaluation of the feminine in our society. Feminist theologians such as Mary Daly (1985) examine the negative consequences that partiarchal religions, which refer to God as He, have on women's development. One of the women in this study experiences greater valuation of being a woman through a new understanding that "God" not only represents a male image but also a female one. Christ (1979) suggests that connecting with and valuing the feminine may be facilitated through understanding the meaning of Goddess symbolism. She describes four aspects of Goddess symbolism which include the "affirmation of female power, the female body, the female will, and women's bonds and heritage" (p. 276).

In their phenomenological study of being criminally victimized, Fischer and Wertz (1979) describe "the three ways in which victimization must be surpassed for complete recovery: the victim's active efforts, the world's repeated reassertion of social harmony, and the active assistance by others" (pp. 153-154). These three aspects are also reflected in the healing process of the women in this study: taking action to avoid further violence, receiving support and guidance from other women, and increased understanding of the importance of working together to end physical and psychological violation.

This study reveals two significant themes of group experience not discussed by previous researchers (Hartman, 1983) who have studied the group counselling experience of battered women. One of these themes involves a heightened valuation of being a woman and of women in general through seeing the valuableness of "feminine" qualities which have been devalued within a patriarchal society. Other researchers (Gottlieb, N. et al., 1983) have described an increase in self-esteem and greater appreciation of other women through seeing the self-sufficiency of women but have not attributed the increased appreciation of self as a woman and of other women to an increased appreciation of "feminine" qualities (i.e. emotional expression, mutual sharing, attending to the emotional needs of others). The second theme reflects a heightened ability to assess the quality of relationships. This ability develops in part through a new experiential understanding of what constitutes a healthy, supportive, and non-abusive relationship. The new experiential understanding evolves from the development of supportive and open relationships with the other women in the group. The supportive relationships formed within the group are then used as a guide or reference point to evaluate their relationships outside of the group setting. In addition, the positive experience of group counselling is used as a reference to evaluate other counselling experiences which is particularly important because it helps the women to recognize: counsellor attitudes which may perpetuate their victimization and therapy approaches which do not meet their needs.

Therapy Implications

Four major themes revealed by the women's group experience appear to be important areas to focus upon when counselling battered women. The four themes, as previously shown in Table 10, include: (1) assessment of relationships; (2) awareness of self-responsibility; (3) expanded consciousness and; increased appreciation of self and other women.

Physically and emotionally abused women need the opportunity to learn new ways of relating (i.e. sharing feelings and personal experiences; expressing needs). Learning what constitues a healthy, supportive, and non-abusive relationship helps women to expect the same type of relationships outside of the group setting.

Expanded awareness of the prevalence of wife assault and of the victimization process helps to lessen battered women's self-blame. Their realization that they are not at fault, helps to facilitate self-disclosure and sharing with others.

The devaluation of the "feminine" within a patriarchal society has resulted in women's lack of self-care and appreciation of themselves as women. Understanding this is an important part of the healing process. The awareness aids in facilitating self-responsibility for their physical and emotional well-being. The focus on the victimization process should therefore incorporate an understanding of the larger socio-political system. Additionally, group counselling should involve discussion of a wide range of issues (i.e. sexuality, patterns in family of origin, child rearing, death anxiety, fear of being alone).

Counsellors working with battered women need to communicate the value of the "feminine" qualities (i.e. emotional expression, mutual sharing) and the female body which helps to heighten self-esteem. This process may be facilitated by reference to Goddess symbolism as described by Christ (1979). Emotional expression and healing may also be facilitated through the use of music and guided meditations, such as those described by Mariechild (1981).

The purpose of this study was not to evaluate the group approach which this study's women participated in. However, the descriptive findings speak to the effectiveness of the approach used.

Counsellors who hold a feminist value orientation use a semi-structured educational and experiential approach. Their aim is to provide a supportive environment so that women can acquire new knowledge about their victimization, not only from the counsellors, but also from each other. Information regarding marital violence (i.e. types of abuse, cycle of violence, characteristics of batterers) is provided by the counsellors through a variety of sources (i.e. literature, films, guest speakers). Evidence of achieving this goal can be discerned from the women's descriptions of expanded awareness of their victimization within their marriage, as well as of the victimization of women in society generally.

Facilitating personal disclosure and sharing between the women is a key role of the therapist because it fosters the other goals of group counselling established by the counsellors: to lessen social isolation and provide emotional support; to provide the opportunity to share experiences and to learn from each other; to recognize and express feelings (i.e. hurt, pain, anger); to minimize self-blame and encourage self-responsibility for physical safety and well-being (i.e. devising safety plans) and; to increase self-esteem, empowerment, and self-choice.

The women in this study unanimously expressed appreciation of the group counsellors' leadership style (i.e. non-authoritarian, semi-structured, balanced participation). Their group counselling experience can be used as a reference in which to evaluate other counselling experiences. Knowing what constitutes a positive and healthy counselling experience is important because it helps women to recognize counsellor attitudes which may perpetuate their victimization.

Critical comments by one of the women included: lack of regular attendance by some of the women; group counsellors not informing the group of the reason for absences; an insensitive presentation by a male guest speaker; and too much focus on developing potentialities, abilities, and independence. In considering the latter criticism, it is important for counsellors to communicate unconditional acceptance because battered women also need to accept their vulnerabilities, limitations, and dependencies. Having dependencies should not be seen as a negative trait. Also, I recommend that counsellors incorporate "fun" activities as part of self-development because "play" can be important in facilitating the healing process. Hugette related that she enjoyed the times of laughter with the other women in the group. In addition, individual counselling should be available to the women for exploration of personal issues which they may not feel free to discuss within the group setting.

The group experience of the participants is similar between all three different group programs utilized in this study. The major difference between the groups is in group format. The two groups from Edmonton Social Services are ongoing with open membership. The YMCA group is time-limited and follows a two-stage model of ten weeks each with a third follow-up stage of monthly sessions for three months. Membership is closed after the second session of the second-stage. A limitation of the second format is the absence of ongoing support. If counsellors use this format they need to ensure that the women have a support system to turn to when the group meetings terminate.

Although all of the groups are comprised of women who have been physically and emotionally abused by their male partners, the women vary in their marital status (i.e. separated, divorced, currently living with abusive partner). This is advisable because women who may be considering marital separation are able to receive guidance and support from those who have terminated their marriages.

It may also be important for counsellors to explore feelings and thoughts which serve as an obstacle to joining or participating in group counselling. Three of the women in this study described their reluctance to attend group because of personal shame and a stigmatized image of other battered women. Hartman (1983) suggests that counsellors examine the title they give to groups because some titles, such as "Battered Women's Group", imply a label and foster a sense of victimization rather than empowerment.

Counsellors must keep in mind that battered women may not initially find comfort in being with each other. It took time for the women in this study to feel safe and comfortable enough within the group to be able to share their experiences. In a conference presentation with Allwood, Brown (1981) suggests that practitioners assume that battered women find comfort with each other because it reduces their social isolation merely by the act of joining a group. However, the emotional isolation felt by the women in this study did not lessen until they developed mutually supportive relationships with the other women.

I support the feminist group approach with women because it communicates the values of emotional sharing and mutual support. Women who have been physically and emotionally abused need to be related to in a genuinely concerned and interested manner. I agree with Rush (1974) who explains that the best therapy she has encountered is the healing which comes from the mutual interchange of sharing; truly sharing oneself with another and the other truly sharing herself.

The preceding section provides some suggestions to therapists working with battered women. However, for a complete understanding of the therapeutic process, I suggest that counsellors peruse the individual descriptions in this study.

Future Research

The findings of this study, which indicate the group experience to be a positive one, reflect my presuppositions of the group counselling approach. Data interpretation is never free of researcher bias; hence the importance of verification with the research participants, as I have done, to ensure valid results. Whether the shared positive experiences of the women in this study are experienced by all battered women involved in group counselling is an ongoing question. However, it appears that the group experience may be avoided because of feelings of stigmatization of being a "battered woman". Future research needs to focus on the reasons why women are reluctant to attend or drop out of group counselling. Limandri (1985), in her study of the help seeking patterns of forty abused women, suggests that women with low stigma to therapy but high stigma to abuse seek counselling more often; and women with high stigma to therapy and low stigma to abuse seek police or legal help more often.

The unstructured nature of the interviews in this study has both positive and limiting consequences. The open ended style allowed many themes of experience to emerge which may be formulated into more specific questions. This will be useful when researching not only the experience of group counselling, but also when comparing the effectiveness of different counselling approaches.

Personal Conclusion

Caplan (1987) writes that: "It is important to find a therapist who wants to learn what a patient's words mean to the patient herself" rather than imposing their prejudgments (p. 201). In doing this research, I have gained a deeper understanding of the importance of knowing one's values and presuppositions, particularly if one is a counsellor to others. In trying to understand the experiences of the women in this study, I needed to be constantly aware of whether my interpretation of their experience was true of their experience or whether I was using my experience as a structure to understand theirs. It is crucial, not only in counselling or research, but in everyday relationships to check one's understanding with that of the other. Both the feminist approach to counselling and the phenomenological approach to research stress the importance of not only knowing one's values but of communicating them directly.

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Appendix 1

Transcribed Interview with Hugette

L: I would like to hear what your experience in the group has been like.

H: Well basically my experience has been a good one. At first it was initially quite a shock coming into a group like that for various reasons. One is coming into a group where you do not know anyone and I just came in, sort of, out of the cold. Another one is the looking around you and you see these various women and they are women so you identify with that part but you find that it all of a sudden, it hits you, that you are one of them, that you are one of them as a classified woman. I had to finally come to grips with being assessed as a battered woman and that was probably the first reality of the whole thing for me. And at first I was astounded and hurt that this is where I really wound up at and then I found as I listened to them, I was quiet the first night anyway, a lot of them had things to say that were a bit like mine and I could relate to that. What is good about the group is that there aren't any put downs. You can talk if you like. You don't talk if you don't feel like it. But the interaction is there and there is support. I found alot of support through the group as well as information which I wasn't at all even thinking about or knowing about. That part has been to my benefit. We share things in the group. We may go off tangents a little bit but we come back to our initial concern and I think it also helps us let off some of our anger because some of us speak out and maybe that is the one place we are allowed to talk; to say it the way we feel like saying it. It is basically well run. We have the counsellors who sit in with us. They help us at times reach some explanations but they're not like teachers running the whole class. Basically we run it ourselves and I just find that's kind of nice. We are treated as adults and that's the thing that's good about it. We are not just little kids in a classroom as we would think in the stereotyped classroom idea.

L: Being treated as adults do you mean that everyone is expected to participate in some way?

H: No, we're not, that hasn't really been specified as an expectation. You participate if you can especially if it's a topic that is within my own understanding and then I will interject and talk about it but if it isn't then I try to be a good listener and learn from others who are talking. What I also like about it is that it is informative. What I said about it being run by us is true, however, the leaders do set up a structure and there is a topic for the evening. They will do some research and bring some points for us to think about and maybe see the evolution of women losing their power and losing their place in society and how it evolved over the centuries. That was most informative. I enjoyed that one. There are other ones, like we do stats and its about the working poor and how women are considerably poorer than men. That is one of the realities that we discuss. There are others too. The kind of assistance that is available by agencies. Income is a big factor, people do worry, well they don't really worry, but they do talk about how little there is to go around.

L: Was that information surprising to you?

H: Yes. Even through there is probably a real big gap between the people who have money, some of the women are still married so they still have some money I guess, the feeling is not there of animosity. It doesn't seem to be a competition. I find you don't have that there. There isn't even a reference made to that. You dress as you like, you come in as you like and nobody brings that topic up. When we talk about money we talk about group money like what divorced women will get if they go on assistance or what you get if you are all of a sudden down and out and you have to apply for assistance. It isn't like anybody is discussing individual resources, financial resources, or what they used to have and what they have now.

L: Tell me more about your first night in the group.

H: Well, I wasn't alone and I wasn't the only one where I thought I was. I really couldn't believe it that there are as many people needing this. I mean there are other classes besides this one too. And the other thing was that, there was a little feeling of, what would I call it? It's like this can't be, this is unreal. I guess I didn't want to believe it and I was being evasive or else telling myself I'm really not. I didn't want that label. I didn't want that classification either and nor did I even want to admit to myself that I was actually one of these women and I looked around and I figured that some of these gals are really with it and what are they getting it for. They're just genuinely nice women and they are good people. Why is anybody wanting to hit them, I mean abuse them in that way and I found myself feeling a kind of camaraderie with them and I have found the group hasn't let me down that way. They have been supportive. They have also, I think I have a fair amount of acceptance in the group, at least that's how I feel about it. It's just important to come to it. I've been coming now steady since I got going and I'm finding they are helping me see the light for one and the other is it's also making me realize that I wouldn't be the only one to strike out on my own when I do. Others have done it and there will be others after me. It's an ongoing thing. It isn't going to change that fast I guess. But the support from the women has been tremendous. They share their stories. They share whatever they have and whatever they're able to and that's really rather special.

L: It sounds to me like since you've been in the group you've been faced with a decision of whether to leave your marriage.

H: Yes I have been and there has been a fair amount of vacillation too. At times I felt in August I was really gunning for breaking and then things kind of improved. I went on a vacation and came back and things kind of settled down a bit so then I was having another thought. I have been getting an awful lot of pressure from my significant others, people who know me for a longer time and they are just being really resistant to my communication about the dilemma that I'm in. They just don't want to hear it. I haven't had any, I'm sorry to say I've had very few of my friends say I will be here just the same. It's sort of like gee all of a sudden you're kind of diseased or something. I don't really want to know about it and I don't really want to talk to you about anything like that and then they turn on the taps about how everything is wonderful in their home but most of the people I know are in the same kind of work my husband is in and most of them have been through the mill in the same way but they have patched things up or for some reason or other they are staying and they are not talking that way now but they did call me when it initially was taking place, what a turmoil they were going through and so on. I can't really remember how supportive I was to them but I think I still would have been. I mean if they told me I'm leaving so and so, I would have said, I still would accept them as I knew them because they are basically good people but I'm finding I'm amazed and rather disappointed. Maybe I didn't expect it too in hearing this rather avoidance of me now for having expressed my need to be free of this already. I'm tired of the bondage. I'm tired of the slavery. I'm just tired of all of that and I just feel maybe I could, it isn't going to be a picnic. I'll be tied to a job after this but I guess if I have to lose so many of them along the way well I'll have to look for new ones.

L: It sounds like you are getting little support on the outside.

H: Yes. As a matter of fact my family is very nonsupportive. Out of the family I come from, there are eight of us children, I would say two are supportive. The rest don't want to hear about it. They don't want to talk about it and yet what's rather interesting is they are quick to defend outsiders who are going through that kind of hell but the fact that I express that I am in that kind of hell they don't believe me or else they don't want to know about it or else it's like we can't do anything for you but they can stick in and help that other poor woman because her husband pushed her around and my brothers have done that but they haven't bothered to tell my husband: "Look lay off that garbage, that is enough". They don't dare stand up to him at all and in fact if it came to picking sides I'm really convinced now that outside of those two the rest of them would all stand behind him because they would be on his team rather than mine and that's alright I mean (pause) at one time it hurt and now I find I'm not surprised because actually if you have a group of ten and if even one is with you, you are lucky, that is very good, whereas if nine fall away they just do. There is nothing you can do about it so I'm really not that surprised at my family's reaction. I find that now I'm really not so gungho in running after them in that same degree and maybe that is one of the reasons I'm not crazy about having Christmas because it means putting up a big show for them and I think maybe I'm being belligerent now. I don't know but outside of that these gals here in this group have turned out to be much more the much more significant others now. It's almost like, see, whenever you lose some there is always something else that will replace the void so I guess what I was losing in my family group or older acquaintances I was gaining in newer ones. Plus I find the group has also assisted me in forming a little larger network of contacts of people who are knowledgeable in this end and others who like to go out in the evening and others who like to just sit and talk and I find that is important. I need that kind of stimulus too. I need somebody to rap with once in awhile and not be defensive about it and not be put down. It's a different thing talking with a woman and discussing things with a man for some reason. There are some men who can discuss things quite easily and alot more can't I find. I probably sound like I am full of rather dogmatic ideas but I'm not trying to be.

L: Are these new ideas since you've been coming to the group?

H: No not all of them. Some of them are some of them are new. I am really amazed at the resources that are there that I didn't even know existed. I mean in my job I had been taking bookings for people from WIN House over and over again. I knew what WIN House stood for but I never ever associated it to anything close to me at all like this was somebody else. I knew what they did but it was like they were on another moon or something and not in my scope of reality so to speak. It's unreal how we detach ourselves when we are not really wanting to see that much. The reality of being battered came over here when I was in counselling. The reason I went to counselling was because my husband had broke his word. He had promised me that he would hold his paws down and he wouldn't shake me up anymore because I had threatened him with police and of course I probably wouldn't have carried it out but I threatened him anyhow and much to my amazement when another assault came along I didn't do any of those things. I just froze. I didn't know where to go I sat there like a petrified partridge sits and waits for an attacker because I just figured if I stirred I would get more. I just took it whatever it was and you can't even breathe at the time. You just look around and wonder where is my escape going to be and how am I going to get away from here and it was after that I just decided well this man doesn't honor his word. He doesn't give a damn what he hits or how he hits me or the fact that he gave me his word. That was very important to me. And the fact is I couldn't actually go through with the threat I had used. I decided then that there is something wrong with me and I need to get something off my eyes and realize just what am I dealing with and maybe understand it or maybe program myself into really carrying these things out because throughout my life I have been one of these people that although I may threaten I wind up backing down. I don't carry out with my words because I feel sorry or I get intimidated or something happens along the way and I have been a vacillator too but at least the things I have made important I kept my word about. Like I felt it was very important for me to keep my commitments, like if I said I was going to be someplace, I made sure I was rather than skip out or play sick. So I found that once he had broken his word, shoved me in the stairs and banged my ribs up, I just decided this time the stairs but maybe next time it will be down the stairs and regardless of how I have talked to him about it he doesn't seem to realize how strong he is or how threatening he is as a person. He is a tall man, a big man, and he uses all of that to his advantage.

L: Was it at that point that you came in for counselling?

H: Well soon after that. It was such a hellish day at home. It was a day off. And I just thought if I could just live through this day, I'm going to be making moves and this was in May, last May. I've been making moves since then and I can't say I can put on a deadline of when I'll actually make the move but I feel that there really isn't very much hope for us at the way we are going and somehow I have actually stopped caring too. It's not a positive way to feel about anything but I don't really care about that place that same way. I did used to feel very attached to it and then little by little it's falling off. It's just sort of you know like when I actually lose interest in that house then it might be even easier to go and that's coming along alot quicker than I thought it would 'cause for even as of September I was still gungho to keep the house and now I don't think I want that house. I don't want its memories. I don't want its enslavement. I don't want very much about it anymore and he will get to keep his house if he wants. It doesn't matter to me. And I've been told too is, how can you consider this: "you're all he's got". Am I supposed to feel, like I don't know what to do with this kind of a statement, like am I supposed to feel something about that? Am I really obligated to him when he doesn't feel obligated to me? In what way is he obligated to me besides the fact that we're sharing the same house. He is even keeping his money away from me like I'm not supposed to know what he is taking in and when it comes in it's sort of none of my business. That's what he tells me. So in this case what do I owe him and if I'm all he's got, is he really looking after that part of it? I don't know. I don't think so for my part I can't see any signs of concern about me or the fact to treasure me because that's all he's got. The only one who maybe used to have that feeling is myself and I perpetuated it forever, for years and years. And I don't think he's had any attachment or any real — I mean I was useful really. It was probably worthwhile keeping me. I was cheap help and a cheap source of labor really and I don't think that he really has any source of concern for me as such and I think he will manage quite well without me and I don't figure he's going to fall apart just because I go.

L: Do you think your feelings towards him have changed since being in the group?

H: They were changing even before that but they have been changing progressively, more intensely since these rounds of assaults have been coming on like my first assault was after we were married about nine years and the intervals became shorter and shorter in between and now since '81, after I graduated from university, they've been coming on a lot more regular basis and even verbal threats like: "Look I'll knock your teeth out or knock your teeth in or I'll shut you up once and for all". And I kind of feel that, see before he didn't used to talk to me that way and so I had a different feeling about him too. I also felt like I had to respect his wishes more and he played the same games but I mean I didn't quite have the same comebacks to him that I maybe do now.

L: Has the group helped you to explain why his battering occurred?

H: Well both of us selected each other in a way and it isn't that we aim for a battering relationship but the thing is that I stayed in it because I felt worthless. I had a very poor self-esteem, really practically none, and I couldn't think of anybody else seeing anything in me. I would say I was almost obligated to be with him because he at least was my other half so to speak and so regardless of what he pulled off or how he did it I had to go along with that but when I started to go to school or especially after I started to get out a bit, out of the house, we didn't go out any place for over ten years, and after I started getting out a bit and talking with people I sort of realized that people might live in our kind of financial world, work in the same industry, but people were pointing out to me how mean my husband was. At that time I wasn't saying anything or talking to anyone about anything. I was trying to be this so called Mrs. Brady who didn't have a view. I wasn't political. I had no comment. I was like yes, yes, very good, and on and on. Like somebody said to me you just amaze me with all the remarks you have that are always on that sort of one tone, like it's monotonous. People don't like it too much but I found that I used to be that way because I didn't know what all I could say and then little by little I guess I started to grow up and realize that maybe I did have a view and so on but that is exactly when the pressure started coming on like: "Look you're not going to be allowed to use those views, you can not talk that way". In the 60's because we had all that revolution it effected us. I found I liked some of the things they spoke up about and it was kind of good to have a voice, to have a concern about something else other than yourself. They (i.e. the women in the group) gave me a chance to, because I was able to sort of identify with them, it gave me a chance to sort of roleplay abit and get some feathers in my own cap or in my own back so to speak and maybe get just a little bit of strength from these people in the fact that they were courageous and maybe I could be courageous and not just a doormat as I was. Because actually the more doormatty I was, the more I got wiped on. I don't get praised now from my husband. I certainly didn't get any then so really I don't know what I was doing it for and it kind of makes me angry and every so often he would flare up and tell me I was absolutely crazy if I spoke up about anything and I of course I took it then but now I'm not so apt to take it and maybe that's why more of these assaults have come out because it disturbs him when I tell him things. You're not supposed to talk back. He comes from the old school of men having authority and women not. The group has helped me in many ways. I really can't say a bad thing about the group at all and I think they have met my needs and more.

L: In what other ways has the group helped you?

H: Well in the fact that I'm not exactly as afraid. They have told me where and how there are places to go to if you need them. There are also ways of getting to the things you want. I'm not saying they're going to do it for me but at least they can steer me into the right direction. I've also discovered that most of us who are in there have really almost all gone much the same sort of route. That's the other part that's sort of, I'm not laughing about it, it's just that I'm not the only one who thought that way. It's just that I am one of the weird ones because I have stayed in it so long. The younger girls are not as foolish, they aren't wasting their time and that is the younger girls, I mean the younger women 'cause most of them are mothers and women already they are not necessarily girls. They don't put up with nonsense. They have their parameters and once those are not of bounds well then it's out of bounds and good-bye. I also found from the women I work with who tell me about the way their relationships work and that is they help each other. They cooperate. If one's home and one's at work, the other one provides the beginnings to a meal or does some work at home that is necessary to be done. I can't seem to get my spouse motivated to any of that and in fact he refuses to even see that it needs to be done.

L: Was it surprising for you to hear from other women that they set parameters in their relationships?

H: They don't really specify them as such in point form but they know how far they will let their guys go and after that it is out the door and they're not afraid. What I'm seeing now is that while they are committed to the relationship while they are in it if it goes awry it just goes awry. It's not the end of the world. I think had I seen you at this time last year I was already talking about this and seeing the people at the outpatient clinic but a year and a half before this I would never wanted to admit that this is what I am going to be doing. I mean I was going to make it good and help it and get it off its feet no matter what like that balloon was just going to fly and that's all and it isn't flying and I couldn't get it floating and it was a foolish thing I was doing to try and make it float because nobody gave a damn and so I'm not trying to sound bitter about it but it didn't really matter. Those who were going to be with me I'm seeing now they will be with me whether I float the balloon or not and if they don't so what have I missed like I mean I'm finding also that I'm learning to (pause) I'm not that afraid of being left alone or having to face more of alone. We do everything alone basically. There isn't alot of time that we spend with another anyway of any significant importance. We're lucky if we have partners and we can have really special times together but if we don't we spend the rest of the time alone and that's all and that to me is, I've been left alone alot so I've rehearsed that fairly well, I think to the point where there isn't really anything to hang in for and I find too that I think I have to make a move before my health breaks down because alot of people's health starts to break down about this time in life and they either turn to chemicals to keep them or to whatever else and I find that I don't want that. I've been reasonably healthy, quite healthy all my life and I feel before I actually capitulate and become full of ulcers or whatever from this kind of stress I should really consider some peace and I need it 'cause I find that when I'm under stress I get driven to headaches. I also get driven to gutaches which are not phony, they're real, and my poor old stomach, it's the muscles that hurt or whatever but it is so tender, for about three days I can hardly touch it so that's something that is happening there and basically I think that the digestive system does point to high stress or something.

L: Have you noticed your physical health before coming into the group or is this something you've talked about since coming to the group?

H: Well as a matter of fact I think I am healthier since I've been coming to the group because I used to get these unreal, really severe gut pains. I was watching everything I ate and now I find I am slipping up and I'm eating the odd forbidden thing so to speak which I forbid myself to have and I'm not having as many. Maybe I have a more healthier outlet or something 'cause I'm not having as many gut pains as I had. I started to record these gut pains that I would get and I would think: what on earth brings this on; why do I get them? Then I went back. I kept a diary on all of these things 'cause I just figured there's got to be something and if I need to bring this to the doctor at least I can bring these notes, not that they really have time to let you point out any notes because they give you about five minutes and there's no time for talking about notes, but anyway, I wanted to do a bit of study myself and just see what is happening in the other part of my life when these are highest, and most of the time, they were highest when I would go to the job to see my husband. Right before I would even leave, I was already feeling them. I couldn't stand to ride in the truck. It would shake me and I would have this horrible feeling in my stomach, like it was just hurting to get shook in the vehicle. So what was I being so sensitive about? They would last about three days and I'd come back home and I would get over it again. So I discovered that and it was a kind of a pattern that showed itself from looking back on those notes that, my highest times for them was around him and I guess I was holding back alot. Like he would irritate me or he would bug me or he'd go on a tangent about something and instead of verbalizing anything in return I just sort of clam up and take it and take it and take it and so on. I recall this one day I had gone out to Ponoka and I have a poodle she's an older dog but she's one that we had since she was a baby and she's been with us all this time. She's basically my dog and so I have taken care of her and I generally don't chastise her very much. She runs the house and runs me too and I don't really mind it 'cause she gives quite abit and she is a nice little fluffy thing and this one day I gave her a bone and this was on a Saturday. I was getting ready to go to the rig and maybe I wasn't really wanting to go to the rig but anyway I gave her this bone. I was going to give her one as a treat and I put it on the tile floor because the floor can be washed off. She quickly picked this thing up and hauled it off to the carpet. I came back and I pushed her back onto the tile and her leg gave out and she started to squeal and her leg was up in the air. She was squealing her head off and I picked her up and carried her around and I couldn't get this foot to come down and it was just awful so I thought I would take her to the vet but I forgot my car at the garage. I didn't think about it until the dog started to cry like I guess that's how tired you get. I was just overtired I guess so I had to run to the service center and pick up this car. Meanwhile I took the dog to the vet and they had her x-rayed and I told H. (husband) what happened to her. "Ya, go ahead, shove her again," he said, "that's just like you" and I thought why did I tell him to get this. I didn't deliberately want to cause her pain and there was no sympathy about it like "gee that's too bad". I expected a different response and not to be told that it's just like me to bang her up. I don't bang her up and he knows that. I admitted I felt guilty and I was sorry I did it. Nothing was wrong, she just has arthritis and she had one of these spasms where the joint doesn't let go so easy. And that's when I had a severe one. I was practically tasting bile. That's how bad it gets with those gutaches. They're so bitter, bitter tasting.

L: So you haven't been experiencing those gutaches in the same way since being in the group?

H: Yes, it's kind of good that way. I'm glad.

L: When did you start the group?

H: I think it was about in the beginning of August. The lady who recommended I come here was from Duggan and she was leaving so she said I recommend that you go over there because she said I feel you need others to talk with rather than a one to one like you're doing with me.

L: You were in individual counselling with her?

H: Yes. She was a real assuring kind of person, a little different personality than C. (group counsellor). I'm finding it's kind of nice to see a change in social workers from the stereotypical views of them. The initial person who was the most convincing to me, well I mean they are all convincing but this gal started the ball rolling, was a lady from Canadian Mental Health. It was her who gave me all these leads like I just asked her I don't know where to begin but I said I do need to start with something. She said you definitely have to start and she says not only that you're not safe where you're at. She says get out of there as quick as you can and so like I didn't really know what to ask then either but I was talking about it later with the group and they said that more than likely she's been through that mill too and that's probably why she could feel so confidently to tell you to get out and everybody advises to get out.

L: Your physical safety is very important. Can you tell me more about your physical health and your image about your physical self?

H: Well, I think that there isn't any (pause) I'm trying to think of how to word this. What I have sensed from the time I'm with the group is there really isn't a particular comment made about appearance to anyone. I have found myself that I have seen a rather low person coming in feeling quite low and almost showing it all over themselves just in the way they come in appearing and then they come in maybe two weeks later and they are all spiffed up. Its quite a contrast and it's kind of nice and so I think if they are looking that great they must be feeling that great and you can't help but comment to them and just say: "gee, you are looking terrific" and I mean it. I am not saying it for false flattery. It's nice to see in people a healthier turn. I don't know how I appeared to them, they haven't really told me but I feel better. I just feel, I don't feel as worthless as I used to feel and nobody in this group tells me I talk too much. I probably do. I am a talker but they don't use that as a downer for me and of course I try to be respectful of their talking too. I used to really use the put down on myself the dumping on myself routine. Like if somebody would say: "that's really goofy", "ya, that's just like me", I would say. Now I find I hold back on those. I make a conscious stab at that. I find the more you consciously try to keep them out, they don't crawl in as easily, and now I'm even learning maybe I am finally learning some tactics because I'm even learning to shut up and that kind of passes and doesn't bear any comments at all. That part is better for me. I just feel better. I don't feel quite as, as far as my physical looks go, this is the way I look. I don't have to feel ashamed about my large nose even though my husband makes fun about it in a hurtful way. (brief break)

H: What helps me at work is the emphasis on the positive. If you don't have anything positive to say then really you better not be talking at all in a sense, plus the fact that that place just gives me that feeling of goodness. I feel good there. I don't know what it is. It's really odd. It's not exactly the cleanest, it's just ordinary but I feel good there. It's so secure for me.

L: How does that feeling compare to how you feel in the group?

H: I really haven't tested the group but I know that at work they have a concern for my (pause) they feel protective towards me and that to me is one of the most important things. I haven't had that feeling at all from my husband and my home protects me 'cause it has four walls. My dog even protects me, maybe that's why I still have her, but the fact is that at work, like I say, I haven't really tested the group. Some of them have not so much spoken up in my behalf but have asked me if I needed a ride and that kind of thing. That's kind of nice and I offer the same types of things when I come here with my car. But at work I discovered, it's actually kind of intoxicating, this concern that people had for my individual safety. Like all of a sudden I needed to be protected. Not so much needed to be protected but I should be aware that there is danger in things too.

L: They were saying take care of yourself?

H: Yes, take care of yourself and we'll do our part in caring for you too so to speak. We are behind you. We'll provide these things that we can but on the whole you have to fend for yourself and here are the resources you can use to help you and that was kind of nice. I found that almost intoxicating. It's terrible to say for such a grown woman and so many years in life. The group here, I certainly know they wouldn't put me down, and I don't try to put any of them down either, I really haven't had to test them but I think if it came down to it we would help each other out. I haven't yet reached out for that I guess is what I'm trying to say.

L: You haven't become personal friends with any of the women outside of the group?

H: Not too much. Well, I really don't know what they feel about me. Maybe they don't feel the same way about me I don't know, but I think on the whole they let me in anyway. It's not like coming in, if you've ever been on the farm and seen a new animal come into the herd, it usually gets a bunting about, especially with cattle, they test the newcomer. I didn't feel like they tested me in here and I don't think I've given them the test that way so to speak but I do feel though on the whole if I had their calling cards or their numbers, no matter which one I called, they would say yes, come in, 'cause we understand. I feel the same way. They could come down. I don't care how angry my husband would be about it. He likes to limit the people I go with and so on and I think he is just barking up the wrong tree. He's not going to get very far with that anymore. He used to think he could select my friends and decide which relatives I could see and which ones I couldn't see, where I could go. He always said that he let me do these things. My goodness, I'm not a child, that he has to let me. It's better when there's agreement about doing certain things but I don't really feel that I'm that worried about what he lets me do anymore. I really don't care now. That's the whole thing. It's sort of and yet when I had this person kind of tie this one on me about well you're all he has, am I really obligated to, what is my duty there? I'm stuck with that one. I don't really have an answer but I don't believe that that is a correct statement. I think it's kind of, a bit of a guilt trip or something.

L: How have you changed by being in the group?

H: They've helped me accept myself as I am with the features that I have including my big nose and my crooked teeth and some other things. Mainly because nobody draws attention to them. Most of the people here, they have something beautiful about each one of them, and the fact is we're women but we're not clones. We can't be clones and that's special. I just figure that what someone has going for them one way others have something else going for them, and I think they know what it is and that is good. I also admire the women about their frankness. They don't discuss every nitty detail but they certainly don't act ashamed about things like that. That's kind of nice and it's good for me because I have alot of inhibitions about things. I can finally say that, I don't know if it's maturity or whatever, but I can finally say this is what I'm like and this is what I am and this is what you get, when you see me and that's all. And I can't really change very much more and I can do that for others too. I can accept them as they are and not feel that I can change them either and we have to be what we are and hopefully contribute as much as we can. The information that has been garnered from the group, especially C. and C. (i.e. group facilitators) who have led the sessions and the guest speakers we've had, has been tremendous and it's most important for some of us and I think that is one way we gain self-esteem is the fact that we can talk and we are not put down for having an opinion. What we say may not be earth shaking news but at least we are listened to and I think it adds strength to the person because I think for my part it lets us know that, yes, we're not all sociologists, but we certainly have ways of explaining things too. It's reassuring and there's group consensus and group affirmation and that's kind of nice. I have nothing bad to say about this group at all and it must be good for me because I haven't missed any sessions. I like to go to classes and I like to go to groups maybe that's why I like going to university because although it's much more impersonal there, it doesn't get down to the personal like it does here, there were no put downs there either. The only thing that was obvious there was the competition. The group has been good for me. I would recommend it to anyone. I don't know if other people have experienced a similar sort of initial impact about it. You sort of go through a spiral of feelings in that first day in particular. It was even hard after I got out of there. I thought, gee, was that really me, was I there? But for the first thing, I felt quite ashamed that I was going to have to admit this too like it was somehow a degradation in a way and then I got thinking -- hardly; I mean these are people who are survivors, they're not degrading anybody. They've been degraded but they're coming out of it and they're on the road to recovery and so will I recover as well. There was a bit of let down in knowing that, not only me, but them, and the fact is that now I'm like them. But I got over that and I don't feel that anymore at all, like I just feel if I were to meet these gals on the street or at work or wherever, I would be able to call them a friend. And I can take them as they are, as they come.

L: Do you feel this change has come about for you because you are no longer blaming yourself for being battered?

H: Yes and also the fact that I admire their courage. I am not blaming myself as much now. I can see the guilt trips when some people try to lay them on me like even this one about "you're all he's got". I don't buy those as easily now as I used to because I find that those are rather false and they don't stand up under the so called light and so the group has helped me that way and also I feel like I have rights now. Like at work there is a macho fellow amongst us and he doesn't say much but when he says something, he says it kind of well, and he's kind of isolated as well too, and this one day I was talking to my supervisor. He was sitting along beside her. I did ask if I could interrupt and she said yes and while I was talking to her he interrupted me and gave me some replies. I said but I wasn't asking you and my supervisor turned and said you have a bad mood on today and I said no I was talking to you I wouldn't have been able to do that before because I would have had hurt feelings and I would have taken the blame.

L: Are you more assertive with men now?

H: Yes, but I can't win them all. I don't want them all either. I mean some of them are just little bullies and they are an extension of what I have at home. Like I mean if you speak up, you are going to get it, and sometimes I do it tactfully, and sometimes not, because sometimes the only way these people understand is by a direct run so to speak and this going around the mulberry bush with them doesn't always bring around anything. I used to feel I had to please the world. I don't really feel that way now. Those who want to be pleased, will take it as such, and those who want to fight, will fight. It isn't as devastating like say a year ago. I just find that now, maybe I am a little bit more, maybe I'm just growing up.

L: Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

H: It isn't boring and I have fun in the group sometimes. Sometimes we can just laugh and that's another nice thing. There are times when we can actually laugh and laugh to the point where we almost can get tears in our eyes from laughing and it's acceptable. You're not crazy because you're laughing. Maybe it's tension release or whatever. We have crying times too. Not everyone cries at once but some do. Films are particularly hard to stomach. They make the tears come easy. I just find the group is fresh. It's always so fresh to me and it doesn't seem like it's been long at all.

L: Do you see yourself coming to group for awhile yet?

H: Oh yes. I make the time for it. I'll be coming to it probably even after, I just don't know when it's going to happen, and it's probably going to be like everything else with me. Even though I calculate my moves, I still wind up having, I don't like to call it an impulsive move, but it sort of comes more quickly than that. I mean I may ponder the idea and rehearse it and then something shows up or comes upon the scene and I will make a decision and it's that type of thing that happens with me. Like I can't say, like today I am going to take step one, tomorrow I am going to go into step two. It seems like, okay, I've plunged, and now I'm swimming into whatever it is I'm swimming into. Generally I come out of those things anyway so I'm not that afraid of the swim either and it's probably just going to take that kind of, I can't really feature how else it's going to happen. I would like to say I can prepare it and maybe I am going to start. I've even considered maybe I should start looking around for a place. I'd like to find something that I can have keys to and maybe put some things away but the other thing is you have to trust and maybe I'm not trusting yet like once you put your things in someone else's place then they have control over your things too and then I'm wondering how badly do I want things, like things keep one bound up. I can't visualize how I'm going to, I know that talking about it isn't going to work. It's not going to be a sensible kind of thing like some people have. The people I've talked to who've described their separation or their move out was done rather sensibly. There wasn't alot of, and then others have had to do it much more drastically, so I don't know what mine is going to be like. That is sort of the unknown yet.

L: What kinds of things would you not feel comfortable discussing in group but that you can in individual counselling?

H: Because I have a more inhibited nature I would be able to discuss more intimate things with an individual compared to the group. I wouldn't really want to reveal so much about my inhibitions to the whole group yet. I'm not that comfortable with that. That's probably my most hangup I would have or to really talk openly. Maybe in time it will go away too. But other matters like legal or something of that nature I am not so afraid of discussing in the group and we share that kind of information easily in the group.

L: You mentioned a counselling experience at the outpatient clinic. What was that experience like?

H: I'd gone there to begin with because I was talking with my daughter about Christmas and I said I'm having such a hard time. I can't figure out why I have all this resistance and yet at that time I felt compelled to do it because it was necessary for me to put on this feed. I always feel like I have to put out a feast because it is in memory of our mother who died just prior to Christmas time. I would put on this dinner regardless of how much I had to prepare for it. H. (husband) would give me alot of flack and I discussed it with my daughter. I said I can't figure this out. I've been doing it for years, and I'm still getting all these reverbs that are so doggone hard to take. There's no cooperation, no anything. I'm really wondering why I'm punishing myself like this. She said I know you are not very happy at what you are doing. I can't really get into what's your problem, she said; why don't you go to counselling and find out. She advised me to go to the University outpatient clinic and I did. It was there that the assessment came out really hard and then after that they recommended I come into their group sessions. There were all sorts of people, most of them were people coming out of the Alberta Hospital and they were either drugged or whatever, it didn't matter that much, there were young and old, all sorts of people, alot of them had really severe difficulties. So I found that when I went to these groups there was really very little talked about battering. They were talking about drugs and mental illness, shortage of money, that kind of thing, for them it was relevant. I found that it wasn't really giving me alot. I wasn't trying to be too demanding about it but I just figured, what am I doing here, and at that time I was still doubting the label that I was told I was starting to fit under, which was as a battered woman. I found that was really hard to swallow. Like I didn't want to accept that from that psychiatrist who told me that, like he just really pulled all the plugs out of my boat and it was sinking. Water was coming in and I was having a bad time. I didn't want that ship sunk that fast or that way. He just laid it on the line, the way it was, and I, and all I could really do was just run away from there. Just go and not face it but what's the point. You have to face it anyway and I don't know if I would even recognize him if I saw him again. I just found him maybe in a way what was also not so good about him was the fact that he was a big man and he spun around in his chair and came to face me and told me just bang, bang, bang, all these things. He looked at the analysis, that of the questionnaire I had filled out, and he fired all these shots at me, and besides I had the sun blaring in my eyes and he was in the shadow looking at me, plus there were about six students lined up in the chairs at the side. I was really ashamed of it all. I figured the whole world knows! See, what was I concerned about? Not necessarily about myself but more about what are people going to say and how is the world going to see me, as this kind of, and before that I thought I was quite well in control of my life. I maybe was, but I just found it shattered so badly there, like it was such an unnerving thing for me to have had this. I didn't see him (i.e. the psychiatrist) again. I don't even know his name. He not only met with me but he also met with the caseworker who was working my case. She came in along with me, as well as another lady, and these students, and they didn't tell me there would be students, an audience there, all of them watching, like I just figured, oh great! an experiment! All these people watching. I just felt like I was thrown in like a calf gets thrown out into the rodeo, you know, all of a sudden it gets thrown in and gets lassoed or something, something is happening to it and it doesn't really know where it's coming from, from all sides and so on, it was a little much! If they (i.e. the women in the group) would have all kind of opened their mouths and attacked me at once I would have probably run away too. I mean I left from there as quickly as I could. I didn't really run away but it didn't take me long before I was out of there and I was crying my head off. I just couldn't stop. I just couldn't get myself put together and before that I was rather, well I just wasn't letting go, I was sort of feeling, probably keeping all these things, getting all these gutaches, that's probably what was happening.

L: How many times did you go to the group there?

H: Several times. I would go when I could and then after awhile I got so, I talked to that caseworker and I said I either need to see just you, she said we haven't got time for that kind of thing. She says we don't have time for you because you're not really coming to grips with what you have to do. They were almost impatient with me 'cause I was still hanging into this old mold and I just figured maybe I could change something myself. I really didn't want to shatter my home, I had to keep it, but I don't have to keep it.

Appendix 2

Study Description to Co-researchers (Research Participants)

I am a masters student in the counselling program at the University of Alberta, Dept. of Educational Psychology. For my thesis, I am doing a descriptive study of the group counselling experience of women who have been physically abused by their husbands.

I hope to interview you to increase my understanding of your group experience. In the past I have been involved as a co-therapist in a counselling group for physically abused women and I hope to continue working with women in the future. I am also interested in this study because there is little information available on how "battered women" experience counselling. I will share the results of this study with the group facilitators. They may find the results useful in determining whether the group's objectives are being achieved.

Participation in the study will involve three interviews with myself. The first interview will be an opportunity for us to become acquainted. I will ask you about your background and will share mine with you.

In the second interview I will ask you to describe your group experience as explicitly as possible. It is important to know that there are no "right" or "wrong" responses. I wish to learn of your experience in the group whatever that may be for you. This interview will be about two hours and will be tape recorded if you are willing to be taped.

All information will be kept confidential. I will ask you to make up a name which will be used on all your material and in my thesis. I will be the only person who will know your real name and I will not use any information in my thesis which could identify you. I will also erase any tapes after transcribing them.

The third interview will involve examining my understanding of your experience with you. Also, after I complete the study I will be glad to share with you what I have learned.

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you may stop at any time. Your agreement to be interviewed will be seen as your consent to participate. Therefore, a signed consent will not be necessary. If you decide to withdraw from the study, all information about you will be destroyed.

~~If you~~ have any questions or wish to discuss anything with me, please feel free to contact me at my home number 488-8769.

Lynda Kordyban